

SHAKESPEARE'S
HAMLET
A NEW COMMENTARY

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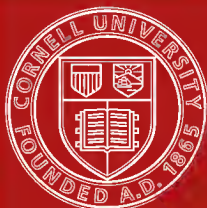
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SHAKESPEARE'S
H A M L E T
A NEW COMMENTARY

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A NEW COMMENTARY

WITH A CHAPTER ON
FIRST PRINCIPLES

BY
WILBRAHAM FITZJOHN TRENCH
M.A. (DUBLIN)

LONDON
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TO
M A M I E

*Si le roi m'avoit donné
Paris sa grand'ville,
Et qu'il me fallût quitter
L'amour de ma mie,
Je dirois au roi Henri,
Reprenez votre Paris,
J'aime mieux ma mie : ô gué !
J'aime mieux ma mie.*

LE MISANTHROPE.

PREFACE

HE greatly ventures who would write a new commentary on HAMLET. For in one generation after another, minds of a high order, both in the English-speaking parts of the world and in Germany, have given themselves to the earnest study of this tragedy and its character problems. Germany, in particular, has supplied every variety of HAMLET-criticism, high and low—has given us Goethe's and Schlegel's suggestive impressions, which could not but greatly influence British criticism, and has given us also Werder's paradoxical view of Hamlet as a successful man of action, and Tieck's unpardonable hypothesis as to his relations with Ophelia. Furness, in the Bibliography included in his great 'Variorum' edition of the play, gave a list of some fifty German translations of HAMLET purporting to be original and independent translations; which perhaps tells as much, respecting the appeal of the play, as does his list of over two hundred German essays and criticisms relating to HAMLET, or his 14-page catalogue of the nineteenth-century criticism in English. And since Furness's edition appeared

(1877) much more has been published in England, Germany, and America about the same subject. But the conviction that much of even the most brilliant criticism has been too hasty, so that a vast amount of what is of high dramatic and psychological value has been left unattended to, some of it having indeed been assumed to be incapable of elucidation, is what has led to the writing of this book.

The method herein adopted, consisting in separate treatment of the successive acts, with little or no anticipatory reference to what is to be learned from acts not yet in hand, and with frequent reflection upon plot-structure, is the method which I was in the habit of following when lecturing on the greater plays during my tenure of the chair of English Literature in Queen's College, Galway, and afterwards in the National University of Ireland (University College, Galway), a post which I have recently resigned. But while the method of this commentary is thus accounted for, the matter comprised in it goes far beyond what one could set before young students.

The general reader who seeks help in the reading of HAMLET, but would wish to avoid philosophical matter and (so far as he may) technical matter, may neglect the introductory chapter and most of the matter in the Appendix. One who desires to find a satisfactory refutation of some of the most fundamental of my 'first principles' may be referred

to Mr. Balfour's brilliant Romanes lecture.¹ One who desires to distinguish the new from the old in the commentary might read, for general treatment, the HAMLET sections in Prof. Dowden's 'Shakespeare: his Mind and Art'—an admirable and well-known work by one who was my revered teacher, and the loss of whom but now has left us all mourning—and Lectures III and IV in Prof. Bradley's 'Shakespearean Tragedy,' an important work of more recent date, about which I can only say that although I am unable to appreciate the treatment of HAMLET therein I am sensible of the very great worth of some other parts of the work. Such a reader might also refer, for detail, to the edition of this play in Methuen's 'Arden Shakespeare' (ed. Dowden), in Blackie's 'Warwick Shakespeare' (ed. E. K. Chambers), or in the Cambridge 'Student's Shakespeare' (ed. A. W. Verity): a digest of the mass of HAMLET-criticism is incorporated in each of these editions. What will remain unaccounted for by the suggested course of reading and reference, and by any further references in my notes, will be (if I mistake not) more or less new. The principal passages of such a character are, I should suppose, those on the following subjects:—the source and nature of Hamlet's madness, with the explanation of his conduct at the close of Act I; the reason for his selection of the

¹ *Criticism and Beauty*. By the Rt. Hon. A. J. Balfour, M.P. (Oxford. 1910.)

Pyrrhus speech in Act II, Sc. ii, and the analysis of his soliloquy at the close of that scene; the authorship of the sub-play; the explanation of Ophelia's attitude, and, in consequence, of Hamlet's words to her in Act III, Sc. i, as well as the analysis of her lament over his insanity; the examination of Hamlet's interview with his mother; the elucidation of Ophelia's utterances in Act IV; finally, the many illustrations of the difference between stage effect and the Shakespearean conception of dramatic effect, and much of the matter in the Appendix.

Able thinkers may be liable to draw too much upon their internal resources while handling Shakespeare's work. There is an unparalleled condensation of thought hidden under Shakespeare's florid and sometimes turgid (though so often supremely poetical) language; there is an unapproached fecundity of fortuitous reference and suggestion in HAMLET; and the actual text of the tragedy affords exercise enough to intellect and imagination. Distinguished critics may write to the effect that 'We may imagine Hamlet asking: How am I to do the deed? What will be the consequences of attempting it? my death? mischief to the State? Can it be right to kill a defenceless man?' and so forth. I respond by saying that I cannot trust myself thus far; that if I were intended to think of Hamlet as engaged in 'an endless and futile

mental dissection of the required deed,' Shakespeare would have substituted more appropriate soliloquies for those he has given me ; that Shakespeare does show a certain aspect of the required deed to have engaged Hamlet's thoughts ; and, finally, that the fact that that one aspect is not even included in the long list of aspects given by the critics who follow Schlegel, is sufficient justification for my endeavour to restrict myself, as best I can, to the actual contents of Shakespeare's text.

In Mr. Bradley's valuable work will be found an interpretation of HAMLET which is quite incompatible with mine. That Hamlet was a man who at any other time and in any other circumstances would have been perfectly equal to the task assigned him—that he was a soldier—that he might have made a good king—that his views on drama were Shakespeare's views—that his mad behaviour at the graveside was deliberate—that his cruelty to Ophelia admits of no explanation—these are but samples of critical opinions wholly contrary to mine. In the text I have for the most part avoided digressing to controvert views from which I differ ; but many of my readers ought to be familiar with Mr. Bradley's important book.

An unfortunate result of the difficulties which such a play as HAMLET presents is a tendency on the part of most to say when perplexed, ' Shakespeare has here made a mistake.' I would

give as an example of a large class of criticisms of this sort a remark by a distinguished author, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch.¹ 'Puzzled' by the treatment accorded to Ophelia by Hamlet in Act III, Sc. i ('we cannot,' he says, 'see what Hamlet and Shakespeare are driving at'), he finds an explanation in Shakespeare's having altered the character of Ophelia from some earlier conception of it, and having neglected to alter Hamlet's character to suit. With the greatest respect—I protest. There is no harm in saying that the play is defective for stage purposes: the difference (to this dramatist's mind) between dramatic and histrionic effect will be made abundantly clear in the course of this commentary. Nor is there any harm in thinking when we are in difficulties that Shakespeare is at fault, on the ground that he ought to have made the play easier for us. Nor is it impossible for Shakespeare to have erred in many other ways. What it is perfectly reasonable to object to is the suggestion that there are defects in the psychology. For the play is recognised as supreme; and its supremacy can consist in nothing else but the truth to life of its complex and perplexing characterisation. I admit that the passage in question has not hitherto been satisfactorily explained: but if my own explanation did not satisfy me, I think that what

¹ In the preface to an illustrated edition of the play published by Hodder & Stoughton.

I ought then to say would be that I could not yet understand this passage. It is with no thought of disparaging an eminent author that I write thus, but only to show what sort of criticism I dare not allow myself when handling Shakespeare's maturer work. Why, Furnivall was an eminent scholar, respected by us all for great and varied ability : and he, finding that there was much in HAMLET that he did not understand—the explanation in such cases is to be found in lack of leisure—ventured the opinion that the play contained 'startling inconsistencies' ; wherein he was very far wrong.

I have refrained from much criticism of a textual character ; though one could not leave unnoticed such a line as, for example, 'Which bewept to the grave did not go,' the universal misunderstanding of which (as of its context) has been a great loss. On the other hand, I have considered at some length the division of the acts—our accepted division being wrong—because one cannot deal aright with the structure of the plot without considering that ; and it certainly was not to the dramatist a matter of indifference, as it has been to almost all his critics.

When I have made reference, by scene and line number, to a passage in any play other than HAMLET, the numbering is that of the 'Globe' edition. In the case of every HAMLET reference, I find that the shilling volume in Dent's 'Temple Shakespeare'

tallies line for line with the 'Globe' edition ; which I here mention because the small volume is convenient for reference, and my desire is to ensure constant collation of the commentary with the text. Save in relation to the text commented upon, the commentary is nought.

W. F. TRENCH.

DOWNSHIRE LODGE,
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HAMLET

FIRST PRINCIPLES¹

A GREAT work of art may exercise, upon an untrained mind susceptible of impressions, an influence which although indeterminate is yet potent ; potent enough it sometimes is to call forth from the soul's wellspring tears that are not tears of sorrow or of joy but of admiration and of wonder, while the soul's hands reach forth stretched open wide in longing that must have psychical affinity (near or remote) with prayer and adoration, the soul being vaguely conscious that the infinite is near, and that she herself is indigent and small. After that, if there be leisure for the consideration of Art's principles, and patience and sobriety enough for critical study, much profit may ensue. Criticism, being scientific, may seem at first to appeal to reason only, and to demand the quiescence of the other powers of the soul : but soon she finds herself at liberty to stand elate in the exercise of all her faculties, soon learns that enlargement of comprehension or extension of

¹ This chapter may be regarded as independent of the commentary proper ; and the reader who finds it uninteresting may therefore neglect it.

horizon results from the training and refining of judgment, so that reach upon reach hitherto unseen stretches before her clearer vision now away into the illimitable, while she realises with more assurance than before that in Art one may lay hold upon some of the fragmentary manifestations of the infinite.

The tragedy of HAMLET is a work perfect in conception and in execution. To know HAMLET should mean great and varied gain. But wherein, precisely, it may be asked, is the gain in such a case to consist? ¹ Now this fundamental question is matter of ancient and modern disputation. The popular tendency, which was also a Greek and a Renaissance tendency, to regard Art as having a didactic function, is opposed, on account of its apparent confusion of ethical with æsthetic values, by many cultured writers, who are at pains to declare art and morals unrelated, instruction and poetic worth wholly independent; but some of them express their own views on the subject in, to say the least, a disputable form. Certainly it would not do to say, for example, that pleasure, as contrasted with instruction, is the end of a work of art. For, strictly speaking, its only end is expression.² If genius has succeeded in perfectly expressing itself,

¹ On this subject, Mr. Bradley's lecture on 'Poetry for Poetry's Sake,' and that on 'Shelley's View of Poetry' (in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*), are of much interest.

² Some further observations upon art as expression will be found *post*, pp. 33-7 (with some special reference to Beauty), and p. 211 n.

then the end of art, for genius, is attained ; and if the observer has succeeded in getting conveyed to him, through the sensuous form, the mind of the genius, then the end is for the observer too attained. The *occasion* which led to the production of a poem—the proximate cause not of the poem but of the poet's writing it—may have been the poet's need of money, or his feeling that the public needed instructing ; but the *cause* of the work—its ' efficient cause '—was the endeavour after adequate and permanent self-expression ; and the *end* of the work—or its ' final cause '—is that expression which was endeavoured after. The occasion which led to the production of the work was external to the work, and is done with ; but its end is inherent in it, and lives on. The poet may have greatly wished to give pleasure, or to make money ; but his attitude considered æsthetically—his attitude *as poet*—consisted in a concentration of his forces towards adequate and permanent self-expression. So, too, the occasion of the reader's study of the work may be a wish for pleasure or for instruction ; but his sole end from the æsthetic standpoint—that is, *as reader of poetry*—is attained by the free admission, through the channels of sense, imagination, and reason (all in exercise together), of the sensuous, imaginative, and rational elements, which in their union constitute the poet's work. Not one of these three elements, nor of their respective influences, can be held to be quite independent of ethics : the

worth of them, severally, depends upon the moral character of the poet as well as upon other considerations equally removed from the æsthetic. It is not severally, but in union, that they come to us in the poem; and the poem's *end*, intrinsic in this union, is to be judged upon lines that are purely æsthetic; but its *effect*, and hence its *value* as a poem, depends in part upon what is extrinsic, depends in part, among other things, upon the poet's morality. Just as a textile fabric absorbs a dye, so is the receptive soul impressed by the colours of art: the dye may be judged upon purely æsthetic lines; yet if it strengthen the fabric, then a part of its value as a dye consists in that, and if it cause the precious substance to corrode, what then will have become of its æsthetic worth? Thus, finally, it may be said that the truth with regard to the purpose and profit of art lies not in opposing a cultured to a popular view upon the subject, but in a synthesis of these two views.

What then, be it asked afresh, are the great and varied gains derivable from a study of such a work as HAMLET? First there is the satisfaction—emotional, imaginative, and also intellectual—which a beautiful and perfect work of art affords once it has come to be understood. And then there is the educative influence, thus coming in pleasurable mode, which it is to exercise upon us: in that it is to purify (or rid of vulgarity) the emotions¹

¹ Tragedy 'arouses pity and fear with which to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions' (Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans.

by arousing them through ideal objects particularly worthy in their universal or far-reaching interest ; also in that it is to elevate and enrich the imagination ; and finally—least important with the lesser poets, supreme with the supreme ones—in that it is to furnish the mind with an interpretation of life and with wisdom to apply to life's phenomena henceforward. An artist should not preach, and does not teach by preaching ; but he presents, and if he is great enough he teaches much by presentation. He has a philosophy, which indeed he might not be able to analyse and set down in prose, for his mind may not be disposed to work analytically at all ; yet his art, if understood, will expound it more surely than any dialectics or dull prose.

Philosophy is the universal ; it comprises the causes of things, the principles that control phenomena. An infant, and for that matter a

Bywater). What is 'catharsis' ? The arguments on behalf of its meaning 'clearing away' are conclusive, according to the recent authorities. But 'notwithstanding the arguments' (says Mr. Bywater) 'the old interpretation of *παθημάτων κάθαρσις*, which makes it mean the "purification" of certain passions, is far from being extinct.' Yes, and for good reason too. If I have understood Butcher's treatment of the subject (*Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, pp. 242-73), he, while accepting the translation 'purging (away),' and the theory of 'homeopathic treatment' (the theory of the clearing away of emotions through their excitation), nevertheless gets back, in the interpretation, to the thought of 'purifying' as contrasted with 'purging away.' If Aristotle held that the excitation of emotions gets rid of them (a very questionable theory, surely, though perhaps more or less related to a psychological truth which will be found stated *post*, p. 211 n.), we may yet be tempted to read into his words, as did the older interpreters, this truth about the refining influence instead.

dog too, may apprehend with the understanding an individual phenomenon, and may feel after the cause of it along analogical lines ; but it is man's privilege to attain, by reason, to the formation of generic judgments, and to the knowledge of abstract principles that are universally valid. Such knowledge confers upon him great superiority ; because the apprehension of one general principle means the possibility of comprehending all the phenomena that may come under it. This is philosophy ; and this in relation to life is that with which we have to do—the philosophy of life. Now there is a twofold dissimilarity between this and the 'natural philosophy' of the physical world. In the first place human life presents, as the most important cause productive of phenomena, the more or less free Will of man : and as that Will, because of its freedom, may in its motions be right or wrong, the philosophy that has to do with those motions finds moral issues everywhere involved ; so that while the philosophy underlying the physical sciences is concerned only with what is, and with laws that are irrefragable, the philosophy of human life is concerned not only with what is but also with what ought to be. In the second place, while matter, and the forces of the material, indefinitely complex at first sight, may become simpler under observation, unsuspected affinities being found to link in a wider homology things that appeared unrelated, spirit, on the other hand, and the forces

of the immaterial, may tend to become more perplexing under scientific observation, and may finally elude analysis. Whence it follows that while there is a possibility of advance by regular gradation in the philosophy of the material, there may not be any corresponding possibility in respect of the philosophy of life. In this department the greatest truths are sometimes reached not *gradatim*, by a concatenation of evidence, but *per saltum*, by the propulsion of human spirit out towards infinity. At this we scarcely become progressively proficient ; but great artists and poets, seers arising now and then, and here and there, are better able for it than the rest of us ; and so from artist or poet, of thousands of years ago or of to-day, we may learn something of a philosophy of life better than from any scientific discourse. Indeed, besides these, and those to whom they appeal, there are others too who have become seers and have learned sublimest truths without science ; but to reflect upon the doctrine that through religion common people may be exalted into mystics is no part of our immediate concern.

All these, all who are gifted with the requisite long sight and insight, who in their measure understand man and the world—all these have attained to a philosophy of life. Such a possession will greatly ennoble its possessor ; for it will raise him at times above life's hurly-burly into a region that is called the region of philosophic calm. Among

those in this respect peculiarly happy, Shakespeare is to be regarded as pre-eminent :

felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas.¹

In those heights of contemplation whence the world of man was spread out as a map below him he did not indeed dwell always aloof : he must, on the contrary, have lived to the full the full life of Elizabethan men : yet at all times was he free to withdraw to the lofty solitudes of the territory that was his own.

It is with the philosophy of life that we have to do : it is with human life that Art, or that Shakespeare, is concerned. Now this subject is wide enough, being no less than the whole of human knowledge. For what does an individual know but subject and object correlated—self and all that in consciousness is presented to self ? Or what may humanity's knowledge comprise, but man, and all outside of man only as related to man's life ? The things of the external universe are known to us not directly, *per se*, but as phenomena, as objects presented to self which is the subject ; that is to say, they are known to us only in relation to human life. And besides the universe, what else is there but God ? That there is no knowing Him as the Absolute is a lesson of metaphysics ; while ways of knowing Him relatively constitute the subject-matter of theology and that of other

¹ Virgil, *Georgics*, ii. 490.

studies too ; for if He is to be known as law, or lawgiver, as Father, or as displayed within the spatial and temporal limitations of incarnation, all these, it is evident, relate to our universe and our life. But though our knowledge is thus limited, our limitations certainly are not narrow. And certainly, though earth is its dwelling-place, the rational soul is furnished with pinions, is endued with the glorious prerogative of undertaking short flights towards the empyrean as to a true home :

Clasp with thy panting soul the pendulous Earth ;
As from a centre, dart thy spirit's light
Beyond all worlds, until its spacious might
Sate the void circumference ; then shrink
Even to a point within our day and night ;
And keep thy heart light, lest it makes thee sink
When hope has kindled hope and lured thee to the
brink.¹

Yet that which in such flights has been glimpsed at, whether it prove, as it may prove, ineffable, or find expression, as it may find it, in picture or in poem rather than in prose forensic and ratiocinative, is all, in any case, relative still ; what has been

¹ Shelley, *Adonais*, xlvii. But these beautiful lines have had the misfortune to be reputed unintelligible. W. M. Rossetti, in his edition, described the stanza as 'a rather obscure one,' and interpreted it, though with much hesitation, upon lines which deprive it of sense—suggesting, for example, that the first words mean 'He calls upon the mourner to consider the magnitude of the planet Earth' ! Such interpretation seems to be due to preoccupation with the elegiac *context*. For the same reason Shelley's most recent editor, Mr. C. D. Locock, merely says it is 'a difficult passage,' and quotes part of Rossetti's explanation.

seen is relative to the one who has seen it. The life of man is our whole concern: all that we may see or know or speculate about is relative to that.

Man, then, and all his feelings, thoughts, and actions; including those his soarings heavenward as well as what brings him to the level of the brute; man and, outside of man, all things, in their relation to man,—not less than all this is embraced within the scope of art. Nor can any form of art keep before it of set purpose the whole wide range of human interests more than does drama. 'I am a man,' declares the dramatist, 'nor is there anything of human concern that I repute to be outside my sphere.'¹ And a special directness in its representation of life is a property of drama which gives it a special facility for the communication of the artist's interpretation or philosophy to those by whom his far-reaching appeal may be heard. For a dramatist's work to exert a little attraction, it may suffice that his interests be vulgar, or it may suffice that his views be his peculiar property; but for it to be of real and lasting worth, his interests must embrace humanity, and his views must compose or comprise a philosophy that is broad and sane and in some measure true. Shakespeare's

¹ Terence, *Heautontimorumenos*, 77. The statement is, of course, not that of Terence in his own person, but that of one of the *dramatis personæ*. Yet when, as St. Augustine records, the theatre resounded with applause at this line, that was partly due—was it not?—to the feeling in the audience that the broad-minded humanity of the sentiment was just what was to be desired in drama.

supremacy rests upon the worth of his philosophy : he has looked upon the whole of human life, and it would appear that he has understood it : to him we turn continually, with a well-grounded assurance of the breadth and sanity and general truth of his interpretation of life.

But how serious is Art, when thus regarded ! About the principles of Art, as about most things, Shakespeare is the teacher of those who have ears to hear him. For if decadence shows itself in scepticism respecting the values of Art—if some say that there are no criteria, that Beauty is merely subjective—there would seem to be, to oppose to such harmful opinions, a Shakespearean doctrine of art, held implicitly if not set forth explicitly, which may in part be learned from *HAMLET*.¹ To us, with our narrow limitations, the breadth of Shakespeare's wisdom, the infinitude of the subject-matter of his thought, is among the great marvels. But the poetic imagination takes all knowledge to be its province. Shakespeare's patience with our limitations is limited : his sympathy with us in our intellectual narrowness or shallowness is small. And it must be well to have a glimpse of wide issues when about to take up seriously the study of his great art as exhibited in a work of such depth and breadth as *HAMLET*, as we may thus be enabled to approach that critical study in a right attitude of mind.

¹ See *post*, on III. ii. 1-79.

Now, if our study is to be truly critical, there are two qualifications that we must possess. In the first place, we must needs be scientific; for our work is analytical. The powers of reason and of imagination required for scientific work in a physical sphere are required here also. Our processes are, to the same extent as those of physical research, inductive: we make the same use of classification, abstraction, generalisation; of hypothesis too and deductive verification: and we run the same risk of letting our imagination get the better of our reason, or of believing that we have proved this or that to be thus and thus, with no better ground for our belief than that we expected to find it so. In the second place, we must needs have a large measure of æsthetic sensibility, which is not always found conjoined with scientific powers, one who is unable for analysis often enjoying Shakespeare deeply, and one who undertakes criticism often lacking emotional capacity. Furthermore, we must needs have at the least a rudimentary appreciation of the humour and of the seriousness of life: indifference might little affect the study of chemistry, but it would much affect our criticism. With such preliminary reflections then, we may turn to the play, to read and to learn. In the presence of Shakespeare we all must either be learners or be fools.

✓ | The principal interest in the study of a play of Shakespeare's must be human life and destiny. For

the purposes of his drama, life is character in relation to environment; and destiny is the outcome of that. The normal case may be illustrated by the analogies of the cornfield. The individual life is as a blade of corn, blown upon by the blasts, shone upon by the sun, growing up in the field amidst its fellow blades. The individual start was, for the purpose of our allegory, the sowing of the seed, or the subsequent commencement of germination in maternal earth: but behind that stretches a pedigree of such length as to reach back to the beginning of things; and the seed has possessed from the very start an indeterminate heritage of proclivities that are atavistic. Next in order came outside influences during gestation; and then came birth into the light of day. The blade is small; nor is it possible yet to say what kind of corn this is: but maturity, though distant, is some day to be attained. And what shall the harvest be? What about destiny? The answer to the question, in whichever form it be put, is that this depends upon character, upon the character of the seed in relation to circumstances of soil and weather, and in relation to its neighbours too, hustling tares perhaps, with whom it may have found itself in competition. Thus in some sense the seed of corn is the maker of its own destiny. But the corn analogy really fails us as all physical analogies must fail when applied to our moral sphere, in which there is, never to be lost sight of, that which differentiates

man's position widely, the mystery of freewill, with responsibility as its corollary. Besides heredity—for which, as Hamlet remarked,¹ man cannot be responsible—besides effect of circumstance, in reaction indeed against both, there is the freedom of choice between alternatives. Therefore in a wider and worthier sense than that in which the grain is the maker of its fate is man the maker or controller of his. Now, granted some element of greatness in the character (whether merely the extrinsic greatness of social position or not), and granted something terrible in the outcome of the character's reaction in relation to circumstance, then this life and destiny may become material for Shakespearean tragedy.

But there are lives and destinies that appear to be abnormal. For such lives there is no answer to that question, 'What shall the harvest be?' because they never reach the harvesting. Those who die in infancy have not had the making of their destiny at all; and the effect of this is that their fate, though it may be very pathetic, is not tragic: their death may indeed be incidental to the course of a tragedy, may be necessary to the exhibition of the character and fate of some adult persons; but it is not in itself tragic material. To the same category belong the cases of adults whose end seems really accidental. But what are called accidents vary. Thus a fatal railway

¹ I. iv. 25.

accident would be sad, but would be too casual to be tragic; whereas a fatal accident in an automobile might not belong to this category, being perhaps the result of a wild act of recklessness on the part of a wild and reckless owner: this might have dramatic value, being connected with life and character; this man's end might be rightly designated tragic. A man must play a prominent part in the making of his destiny for his career to constitute what may possibly be material for tragedy. In his mature and serious comedy—in *TWELFTH NIGHT*, for example, or *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*,—Shakespeare is guided by the same principle: but it is with tragedy only that we are here concerned.

Such, then, is the Shakespearean conception of tragic interest. There is another, which is pagan. A superficial reading of life's story—and it presents facts with regard to which attempts to get below the superficies fail—must seem to justify the view that tragedy consists in man's attempting to war against fate, against a senseless and impersonal fate which is only luck, a horrible shadow which there is no seeing clearly and no warring against. *Œdipus*, blameless as to his will, or to be so regarded, but as to all his actions controlled, for his destruction, by a hideous Destiny, belongs, if true to life, to a category of exceptions which do not help towards but rather hinder a grasp of life's general principles, and which therefore are neglected by Shakespeare. There are in his tragedies persons

whose fate is of tragic interest, although not the outcome, in any direct way, of their character; but then it is the resultant of discernible adverse forces which are moral still in the sense of being personal and human, and which constitute the environment. The working of the wills of adversaries is not mere luck, and its outcome does not constitute a Sophoclean predestination. The tragic interest of *Œdipus Tyrannus* is great, but its fatalism is a conception that is foreign to Shakespeare.¹

Character, then, with its outcome, destiny, is Shakespeare's great concern. To this all else is subordinate. Incidents that make up a story are but accidents, and count for nought, save as they relate to character. Shakespeare therefore often takes a story as he finds it, modifying the outline but slightly, as though feeling that any tale would do almost as well as any other to make a framework for the exhibition of character, the relation of the incidents to which constitutes their sole rational interest. *HAMLET* is a tragedy of blood, eight sudden deaths bestrewing the course of the action. More than enough material, that would be, for the plot of a tragedy of an interest purely sensational, of an interest (that is to say) consisting in excitement. And it may no doubt have been because Shakespeare's audiences wanted the

¹ For a contrary view, see J. Churton Collins on Sophocles, in his *Studies in Shakespeare*. He takes Sophocles to mean that *Œdipus* was blameworthy.

sensational that he gave them so much bloodshed. Yet, if HAMLET be intelligently considered, it will be found that all matter of this sort counts for very little, and that it is the rational that signifies. Indeed there cannot be any play in which interest of character more completely subordinates and even submerges interest of incident.

Closely connected with the critical study of characterisation is that of dramatic technique, or of the manner in which the dramatist arranges his material so as to produce the desired effects. As to this, scientific analysis reveals much that is remarkable. And the unfolding of structure may so exhibit the meaning of a play as to conduce much to the understanding of the treatment of character. The two main subjects, then, that we must have before us as we take up the study of the five acts of HAMLET, are characterisation and plot-structure; and these should be considered in relation to each other.

As to the structure, the first question to occur to us might be, Why are there just five acts? And the question introduces the subject of Shakespeare's method. For it will not suffice to answer that it was customary to have a play divided thus. If he adhered to a five-acts convention it was because he found five the best number. With a view to discovering on what grounds that number appeared the best, it will be well first to consider in some of its wider aspects the subject of artistic unity.

✓ Every work of art requires unity ; which implies a beginning, some sort of centre, and an end. This principle is in its universality of sufficient importance to be worth dwelling upon ; and an illustration of what is requisite in drama may profitably be sought in some other form of art. Photography will serve the purpose as well as any. It might be objected that photography cannot be reckoned among the fine arts ; for it is realistic, with a realism often very untrue, as everyone knows who has looked at a photograph of a line of distant hills which the eye sees to be very high, and which the camera, with the realism of its perfect optics falsifying the landscape for lack of imagination, has made out to be very low. An artist is a creator, and a machine cannot create ; so that the public may be right, perhaps, in applying the term 'creation' to the best products of Parisian millinery whilst refusing it to those of photography. All this is true ; and it is worth while to re-assert the lofty claims of art. But artistic feeling may be employed in selecting subjects for treatment by the camera ; and it is only with selection of subject that we need now be concerned. Let us, then, imagine the photograph of a scene at a lake-side : the margin of shore, upon which the photographer stood, constitutes the foreground and reaches right across the picture in a straight line ; the middle distance is occupied by the sheet of water, which also reaches from one side to the other, and is bounded beyond

by the farther shore, optically straight, and surmounted by the varied outline of its hilltops, which constitutes the sky-line. Now this is a bad picture, in which unity is marred by the lack of beginning and end. The reason why it is wrong is that it is untrue to life : nobody every saw just that view : the photograph represents but a fragment which forms no possible unit in consciousness, no true percept. For true perception the attention must be concentrated upon a limited part of the whole field of consciousness, mentally isolated, and treated as a whole, a unit. This unity is artificial, for the unit may vary while the whole field of consciousness remains unaltered. Thus if two men were to stand where that photographer stood, both looking in the same direction, then the whole field of vision would for each of them be approximately the same so long as neither of them moved ; and it would comprise lake and shores ; but their percepts at any moment might differ. The attention of the one might be wholly engaged with a monument upon the ridge of the opposite hill, while that of the other was engaged with the forms of the clouds over that ridge : each might then be said vaguely to ' see,' but neither of them could be said to be ' looking at,' lake and shores. And the obtrusion of the rest of the contents of the field of vision would in each case blur the percept, mar its unity. The defect in the photograph is that, while certainly not representing the whole field of vision, it does

not represent, either, any portion of it upon which the attention could be concentrated. The monument and the clouds have lines of demarcation which enable them to be mentally isolated; but this is not the case with the view comprised in the photograph: nobody could look at just the amount which it comprises. Yet if there were an arch at hand, through which the photographer might look and the inner edge of which he might make to appear in his picture, bounding the view on either hand, there might then be seen just the same extent of lake and shore as in the other case, but it would now be no longer a fragment but a good picture, the sides of the arch providing the view with a psychological beginning and end, the extent of lake and shore comprised in the picture being just what the observer from that standpoint could see.

This artistic principle, firmly based upon psychological necessity, is in its application to literature fairly obvious, in that everyone knows that a story must have beginning and end. There was in Shakespeare's literary career a time when he did not fully appreciate the principle in its dramatic bearings, or had not learned yet to apply it perfectly. By the time that he wrote *HAMLET*, however, he had learned all that there was to learn about plot-structure.¹

Besides having a definite beginning and end,

¹ The subject of Act I as a formal beginning will be taken up again in the next chapter. For a reference to artistic unity in another aspect, see p. 217, where the classical 'unity of time' is touched upon.

Shakespeare found it well to have a central point. A centre of interest is, indeed, in all cases requisite, some person or group around whom the interest is co-ordinated; for were it equally distributed between several persons or groups, such distribution would be a breach of unity. This is an important subject. Our present concern, however, is with what may be regarded as but a great artificer's expedient rather than anything of such intrinsic import. Shakespeare plans that the plot shall have a definitely central point, towards which all action shall ascend in proper sequence from the commencement, and from which all shall descend in like orderly manner to the end. If we consider the life of an ambitious criminal for some time successful but ultimately overtaken by retribution, there may be a point at which for the first time is to be observed the quiet working of moral forces which are to impair and finally to destroy his career. There must also be a point that is the highest to which through his criminal ambitions the man will have attained. And if, surveying the career as a whole, and in historical perspective, we should find that these two points coincided, and that it was just when he seemed to have achieved his aims, before him apparently lying but peaceable fruition, that there were to be perceived for the first time signs pointing to declination from prosperity through the working of moral law, how appropriate would the coincidence appear to us to be, how suitable that the apex should

be the vertex too. That is how Shakespeare would like to represent it. And he would endeavour to secure that that moral centre should be the mathematical centre of his play. Aristotle wrote of a turning-point which should consist in a 'change of fortune' for the hero, from good to bad.¹ In *MACBETH*, the centre is of this nature. But in other cases it is made just as definite without being fitted to the Aristotelian formulary.² When we turn to *HAMLET*, we find a hero whose career seems in no sense analogous to that of a hero such as Macbeth. The abnormality of Hamlet's temper so delays, so thwarts, as one might say, the normal progress of the plot, that the appropriateness of so definite a moral centre seems less evident in the case of this play. Yet the author of it found good reasons for adhering to his self-imposed rule.³

¹ *Poetics*, vii, x, xiii.

² But the few who have touched upon Shakespeare's plot-structure have expected a centre, if such exist at all, to be always of the Aristotelian species. Mr. Moulton, in his excellent book, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, found a centre of this nature in *OTHELLO*, but it is not there to be found; and the language used by Mr. Bradley (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 54-5) might seem to suggest that there is no definite plot-centre. The case of *KING LEAR* (Bradley, pp. 53-4) is similar. The plot does not in either case consist in anyone's fortunes rising to a climax and then declining; but it has just as definite a centre nevertheless—is just as Aristotelian in principle, though not in the detail which might be mistaken for the principle. The subject is further dealt with in Appendix A.

³ There is a difficulty in the case of *HAMLET*, owing to the division of acts not having been marked in the Folio further than Act II; wherefore an erroneous division, to which we still adhere, established itself later. See Appendix A; also pp. 128-33.

It was the need of a formal centre that made it right for Shakespeare to adhere to the conventional number of acts. That one of the acts may be central, there must be in all an odd number; but three would not leave room for what is to lead from the beginning to the middle or from the middle to the end; and seven or any higher number would result in the absence of that very sense of coherence and proportion which it is the dramatist's aim to secure. So the number five was the best: introduction, development towards centre, centre, development thence towards end, end.

The five-acts scheme was already in vogue when Shakespeare began to write. It was a recognised convention to which all playwrights conformed, and it rested upon no better ground than the belief that the ancients adhered to such a scheme. From Seneca, whom the Elizabethans knew better than any other classical dramatist, they derived it; but Seneca did not understand plot-structure, his plays lacking regular dramatic development, and comprising no rational division of theme to correspond with the fivefold division of the matter. The French Senecans, such as Jodelle and Garnier, had not improved upon their master's example in this. Nor was there much for the Elizabethans to learn from Plautus—best known to them among ancient writers of comedy—for he, being also weak in construction, ignored any formal

plan, and admitted irrelevant episode. In the greatest of Athenian tragedy, perfection was attained upon somewhat different lines ; but with this drama they were not well acquainted. Horace said¹ that a play ought to have five acts, but disposed of the matter in the space of one line, and then hurried off to something else, offering no explanation apparently because he had none to offer save that the five acts were an established convention in his day. But Aristotle, long before, had inculcated a formal structure. His words were as follows :²

A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and an end. A beginning is that which does not itself

¹ *Ars Poetica*, 189-90.

² *Poetics*, vii. 1 (Butcher's trans.). It has to be remembered that, as Butcher points out (*Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, pp. 282-3), Aristotle is not here dealing so much with existing Greek work as with the ideal tragedy. The usual Greek practice knows (for example) no such true beginning as Aristotle here inculcates ; and not only the mature work of Shakespeare but also much other modern drama possesses a truer artistic unity, conforming more nearly in plot-structure to the principles of Aristotle's 'ideal tragedy' than does *Ajax* or *Ædipus Tyrannus*, not to speak of looser work such as that of Euripides. 'The original practice was to presuppose the story as known ; and . . . there is perhaps not one play of Æschylus or of Sophocles which would not considerably puzzle a reader who should sit down to it . . . expecting everything essential to be supplied by the author.' (A. W. Verrall, *Introductio* to Æschylus's *Agamemnon*.) The question which of the great Athenian plays is the greatest is of course largely a question of personal preference, but some authorities (Dr. Mahaffy, for example, in the *History of Classical Greek Literature*) would place *Agamemnon* first ; and the plot-structure, according to the received interpretation, is what one accustomed to Shakespeare's not indeed invariable but yet habitual 'classicism' might well designate extravagantly 'romantic.'

follow anything by causal necessity,¹ but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well-constructed plot, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles.

It was natural that these words should suggest a three-acts division—introduction, development, end—and it was also natural that this should give place to a five-acts division, because the ‘development’ could be subdivided into development towards centre, centre, and development thence towards end. It was by some such process that it came about that according to Roman art-theory all plays were to have five acts; the division of acts corresponding (even though Horace did not say so) with a formal division of theme. The division of

¹ Of course nothing in the world exists that is without causal antecedents; and Mr. Butcher (*op. cit.*, p. 280) says that difficulties have in consequence been felt with respect to these definitions. What Aristotle means, however, is well illustrated by the examples which I have already adduced from landscape. To form any true percept we volitionally restrict attention, arbitrarily isolating a portion of the field of consciousness; but that portion must have such definable content, such outline, as to render it capable of isolation. So isolated, that portion becomes ‘a whole.’ Were this not so, there could be no true unity for consciousness. What Aristotle is here doing is to apply this principle to the plot of a play. There is psychologically no more need to ask what precedes that which is given in the action, or what is its sequel, than there is to ask what is the nature of the landscape, to right or left, beyond the limits of the picture.

theme was the kernel, the five acts were only the shell; but in Roman practice the shell is found without the kernel. Classicism implies regularity, symmetry, much restraint, love of form; but neither Greeks generally nor Romans cared so much for these in respect of plot-structure as did Shakespeare.

Aristotle thought plot the most important thing of all, 'the soul of a tragedy';¹ but in this matter the ancient dramatists were not classical enough for Shakespeare. Nor yet were their modern followers, such as Ben Jonson; while Sidney, who introduced into English criticism what were supposed to be Aristotle's principles, was at one with Aristotle's Italian commentators (such as Robortello) in his ignorance of this Aristotelian theme, and wrote dramatic criticism which, had it influenced Shakespeare, might well have ruined all his work.

But Shakespeare's determination to secure a formal centre carried him yet further. For the

¹ *Poetics*, vi. 9, 15. Butcher says this doctrine has been dissented from; and he proposes to 'modify Aristotle's phrase and say that the dramatic conflict, not the mere plot, is "the soul of a tragedy"' (*op. cit.*, p. 348). But surely it is modern criticism that is wrong. The 'dramatic conflict' is the material out of which the tragedy is made: the plot is the soul of the tragedy. Shakespeare derived from Plutarch not only the story of Julius Cæsar, but much of the characterisation and dramatic conflict too: what then had Shakespeare to contribute? Only plot; yet the tragedy is by Shakespeare, not by Plutarch, because plot is the soul of it. There is many an amusing incident in real life: yet it does not form a comedy. What then does it lack? The soul of a comedy—plot.

bisection of his plot brought him not merely to the third act, but to the middle of that act, and it was his frequent practice to place the climax at the actual bisection.¹ Then, if there were seven scenes in Act III, the centre would be Sc. iv, or if there were six, then in Sc. iii and Sc. iv taken together. Thus, an artifice similar to that which is applied to the structure of the play as a whole is further applied to the central act considered by itself. Such a discovery might well amaze us, since we must feel that while there may conceivably be some effectiveness, for the purposes of the theatre, in placing the turning-point of the plot in the act that is the central one of a fixed number of acts, there can be no such effectiveness in adopting a similarly artificial arrangement of the details in that act, consisting as it does of an indeterminate number of scenes. It cannot have been for stage effect that the dramatist adopted the geometrical arrangement; and this should serve to suggest that he found it to his own convenience to be thus methodical, or that formalism in drama has perhaps some æsthetic quality independent of histrionic values. ✓

¹ Aristotle says (*Poetics*, xviii. 1): 'Every tragedy falls into two parts, Complication and Unravelling. By the Complication I mean all that extends from the beginning of the action to the part which marks the turning-point. . . . The Unravelling is that which extends from the beginning of the change to the end.' It is as though Shakespeare took these words and said: 'Two and a half acts shall be devoted to what Aristotle calls the Complication, and two and a half to what he calls the Unravelling.'

It has never been customary to look upon Shakespeare as a formalist. It is not only that the formal criticism of long ago found it necessary either to reproach him with ignorance of form or to apologise for him on the ground that in spite of it his work was good ; but now, when such criticism is a century out of date, we still recognise him as romantic and free, and we may declare that greatness in art is as compatible with principles of romanticism and freedom as with principles of classicism and restraint. Yet, if Shakespeare constructed plots upon such a formal plan, it would appear that he too was a formalist. But why was it, it might be asked, that his genius was thus confined within the narrow limits of whimsical rules, his art thus hampered by mechanical devices ? The answer is that the reason of Shakespeare's tendency to formalism is the same as that of the Greeks' much more marked tendency thereto, although not derived either at first hand or at second hand from a study of their art ; and that the genius of great dramatists is not confined, nor their art hampered, by such restraint. For what is meant by the term ' freedom ' as applied to art ? That is the really fundamental question, to which, if we are to understand poetic or dramatic form, we must get an answer. Therefore let the question be asked at once of Shakespeare, for he has in some sense dealt with it through Hamlet. The principles governing art, Shakespeare might

say, are the principles governing life: what is good and true in the one is good and true in the other: freedom in art is analogous, precisely, to freedom in life.¹ And thus the question broadens into a yet more general and a yet more fundamental one, as questions are liable to broaden when intelligently reflected upon. Let us address ourselves to the inquiry in its widest form; and the profit of such inquiry regarding first principles need not be limited to the bearing which the result of the inquiry may have upon the matter actually in hand.

What then is freedom? What is liberty? Fine words, whose music many a time awakens a responsive chord in many a noble heart, whose power to stir to deeds of daring has been proved on occasions without number: fine words, but what do they mean? It is a question to which the uneducated and the uncivilised can give a simple answer; for to them freedom means immunity from restraint. What they are ignorant about (alas) is man and his place in the universe. What they have before their minds is the apparent freedom of the seagull or the tiger, whose actions (did they but know it) are really controlled by inexorable law, and whose freedom is not that to which man aspires, who, being higher than these, and possessed of will, needs a truer freedom based upon will. Primitive man, in so far as he has the wild animal's

¹ See *post*, pp. 152-3.

liberty, has not true liberty and fails to progress : the development of civilisation is the building up of a set of restraints which constitute society, and the cumulative effect of which is (in the ideal State) perfect civil liberty ; to which ideal it should be the practical problem of legislation and administration to approximate in the real.

It is, however, in another play than *HAMLET* that Shakespeare treats of civil liberty. Not in the civil cosmos, but in the microcosm of the individual life, did Hamlet find what corresponded to the balance which he recognised to be necessary for art. And indeed it is there—it is in personality—that the foundation must in any case be sought. For a man, then, to live in liberty and to progress, there must be a higher law controlling him than the law of the seagull's being ; and the ideal harmony between, on the one hand, scope and latitude for individual action, and, on the other hand, law controlling, constitutes the perfect law of liberty and the perfect life. The philosophical problem as to how this is in the ideal attainable, and consequently in the real approachable, was much before the minds of two of the apostolic writers, who had arrived at a solution, to which St. Paul, in particular, devoted close attention in his Epistle to the Romans. The only but sufficient excuse for detailed reference in this place to an argument of theological import is that that argument sets forth, in relation to the ethical sphere, principles

which are precisely analogous to those belonging to the æsthetic sphere : and thus the one illustrates the other. The apostolic argument might perhaps be epitomised in something like the following form.¹

The physical universe, including man as viewed physically, is controlled by or evolves compulsorily according to what may be treated as law imposed from without, or still better as the principle of its being, operating within : but man, as viewed morally, stands alone, in that his law, moral law, he is not compelled to obey : if he were, he would have no more personality than a plant or a bird. Warring against the law, which may be considered as imposed from without in the form of a stereotyped, or stone-engraved, decalogue, there is another law, or principle, within him, which is passion, the impulse towards self-expression, the principle of freedom in its first rudiments. The true spiritual problem is how to annul the opposition between law and liberty, without letting either destroy

¹ As I am making an attempt at getting to some of the fundamental principles of æsthetics, it is not at all surprising that I should have to have recourse to an ethical analogy, seeing that the Good and the Beautiful must bear a definite relation to each other, even if that relation is to be conceived of as merely a parallel.

I am not sure whether it was the work of a well-known theologian, Dr. Du Bose, that suggested to me to attempt rendering a part of St. Paul's argument about deliverance from the law into this modern form of words ; but at any rate neither he nor any other exegetical authority is responsible for what I have written ; and I submit it to correction.

the other ; the antinomy having already deplorably impaired the value of both. The solution to this problem is found in the substitution, for the engraving upon stone, of the law written in the heart, through love of the Good, which is the psychologically free response to the perfect manifestation of the Good in the Incarnation.¹ So the restraint, hypothetically from without, of a commandment, is exchanged for the control, personal and from within, of a spiritual principle : the law has become the perfect law of psychological liberty. Passion, which strives for freedom in antagonism to law, has become the passion of love, which, if it works unhindered, is the perfect fulfilling of the law. Control thus reaches its maximum development ; and the concomitant of this, in that the control is personal, spiritual, is the maximum development of freedom. The opposition, then, between law and liberty is gone ; the two developed to perfection harmonise. The old antinomy (so the argument continues) meant moral death ; but the new-found harmony is life : there is a new and a true self-expression,

¹ But why, it might be asked, should manifestation of the good produce love of it ? The answer is that the form that that manifestation takes is love, or self-sacrifice, the emotional appeal of which is potentially universal, and the response evoked by which is similar in kind to the evoking force. This forms an essential part of the apostolic argument, and reference to it is necessary to render that intelligible ; but there does not appear to be anything analogous to this in the other department to be presently referred to, which is my reason for relegating it to a footnote.

and self-expression is life. All this (it goes on to assert) is of course attained only in the ideal, the problem of the actual being how to approximate progressively to that.

Now in the sphere of Art an argument entirely analogous to this one will be found to apply. Art having to do, not with the Good as such, but with the Beautiful as such, the law and the liberty to which we shall here have to say will not be ethical but æsthetical; but only such changes as are involved by that distinction will require to be made. In the first place, there is a need and a desire to be under law: it is necessary, at the least, to be delivered from barbaric irregularity and to attain to some degree of order and form. To this end it is that the artist works subject to the code that belongs to his particular department; some of the code being, like the decalogue in the moral sphere, of a permanent and intrinsic validity; some of it perhaps corresponding rather with other parts of the Mosaic code, which might be described as ceremonial; but all (it may be) serving a good purpose and tending towards order. The artist may accept the whole code without investigation of the grounds of its validity; and he may thus accept it all as of equal authority, because as coming from an external and old-established source that is not questionable. It is even possible that the ceremonial and transient part of it may be attended

to by him to the neglect of the essential and permanent part ; in which case he will have become legal-minded, and his art will be mechanical, like the religion of those persons who, in the routine of tithing mint, anise, and cummin, forgot the matters of weightier import. The artist, then, recognises the law of his department, so that it becomes, to adopt the Pauline expression, 'the law of his mind.' But within him, warring against that law, is passion, which is the impulse towards self-expression, the principle of freedom. What then is to be done? Suppress passion, or repudiate law? But without law we can have no art ; and passion, though in the supposed interest of art it be at times suppressed, is in truth the very soul of art. It will not do, then, to diminish the activity of either of these principles ; and yet every movement of either tends to weaken the other. Where then shall the artist find deliverance? Where but in the substitution, for the legal code, of the revelation of Beauty?

If 'he, as I guess, have gazed on Nature's naked loveliness, Actæon-like,'¹ the contemplation of those perfect lineaments will have produced in his free soul the love of Beauty. Then shall the code of external authority be superseded by a living principle operating within : and even as in the parallel moral circumstances goodness and order result, so here there will be produced beauty and

¹ Shelley, *Adonais*, xxxi.

order ; the revelation of beauty, by kindling passion for beauty, evoking a free response in beautiful work ; which means perfection of form and order. Then not only may all that is adventitious in the code of rules be swept away ; but it will even be permissible for the artist, no longer a bondsman, to relinquish reciting to himself his æsthetic decalogue, whose requirements, remaining unabrogated, will be freely fulfilled in his work. 'What the law could not do' is accomplished through the love of beauty. 'Whose service is perfect freedom' are great words which have an æsthetic as well as an ethical application.¹ For perfect freedom in the artistic sphere is now seen to be compatible, ideally, with perfect control or restraint ; self-expression, which is freedom, which is the life of the artist's spirit, becomes possible perfectly through perfect form. Passion, in its barbaric original unruly, and in antagonism to law and order, becomes, when transformed into passion for beauty, itself the source of perfect order.

Having seen how things are in the ideal, descending now to the real we may re-state the truth at that lower level, saying that in art, as also in life, there is need of a balance to be maintained between liberty and restraint, and that the more there is of either the better, provided the balance

¹ And their Latin original, 'cui servire est regnare,' which presents the matter in a different aspect, has likewise its application to each of the two spheres.

be not upset. Thus re-stating the truth, we put it almost as it is to be found in HAMLET. And we do so with the advantage now of knowing why it is, precisely, that such balance is requisite, in that we have seen that in ideal perfection of art or of life the apparent paradox is found true, that the contraries being concurrently developed to the utmost, in their utmost development harmonise. In the practice of art (as also, indeed, in life), it is sometimes liberty and sometimes restraint that seems to predominate. If it be restraint, we designate the art classical, because at the height of Greek and Roman civilisation, for reasons which may not perhaps be very complex, art was of that restrained character. If on the other hand liberty seem to predominate, or passion appear comparatively unrestrained, we designate the art romantic; just as a life that is unconventional may be called a romantic life, or as a single adventure that takes one off the well-paved track of civilisation's highroad into a situation that is exciting may be called a romantic adventure. It would not forward the interests of our present study to pursue further the subject of these two terms' significance; but it is well to recognise that the terms as thus used to signify opposites may be said to represent degrees of shortcoming, in that classicism in its exaltation of order may tend to suppress passion as opposed to order, while romanticism in its exaltation of freedom may repudiate order as opposed to freedom. Good

work consists in the preserving of a just balance between the two elements; and the more fully the development of each is achieved without the sacrifice of either the nearer has the real approached to the ideal.

Now the way by which the requisite balance between law and liberty is attained by the artist is this. If we speak sometimes of the artist as a creator, we mean that out of a chaos of material—for the sculptor marble, for the poet a conglomerate of words—material to the artist's purpose in either case formless and void, he has to produce cosmos, beauty, form. His strife is to subjugate to his free spirit recalcitrant and unruly matter; and even as moral strife is (morally) the making of a man, so this corresponding strife in the artistic sphere is the making of the artist. For his genius, seeking for self-expression through matter of one sort or another (because it is through matter that spirit must find self-expression if at all), encounters the resistance that imposes upon it restraint. And thus it is that the balance is attained. Marble is so hard that its very nature imposes restraint enough. But words are loose and pliable and interchangeable, and they differ widely from marble in that they are in daily use as media of self-expression of a sort that is fragmentary, transient, and inartistic. Yet are there certain possible combinations in which they become so rigid as to give to any extent the needed resistance. The sonnet,

for example, with fixed number of lines and fixed rhyme system, is, whether in its Italian or its Shakespearean variety, to be compared rather with porphyry than with alabaster. When we turn to drama, on the contrary, we find that which so far as concerns its essential character seems about the loosest of all possible forms. For all that seems essential to it is its directly mimetic function; action of real life being represented in life-like action. Mimetic action may be quite formless and inartistic; monkeys and parrots are able for it in a rudimentary way. Thus that which seems most essential to drama is not even fundamentally artistic. To make up for this genetic looseness of the *genre*, great drama tends to formalism. To make up for it (though not of course with conscious purpose on their part), many an artifice was introduced by the Greeks, many a stiffening convention, until the material with which classical dramatists had to contend was rigid, and gave the needed resistance, like the marble which the genius of classical sculptors delighted to handle.¹ So Shakespeare, in like manner, secured for himself artificial restraints, adopting some of the conventions of the day unchanged, adapting and improving upon others. And an interesting example of adaptation is found in his peculiar geometrical structure.

¹ A narrow criticism may be disposed to attribute most of the formalism of Greek drama to the structure of the Greek theatres; but it cannot suggest that the same element occurring as markedly in Greek architecture is due to a similar cause.

One thing more must be added to these prolegomena. In the detailed study of the play, point after point must appeal to us that could not possibly produce effect in the acting of the play.¹ A difficulty might then suggest itself. Shakespeare, it might be objected, wrote for the stage alone : how can it then be that anything is of much importance save what may be effective upon the stage ? Now the surprising fact that Shakespeare took little care to leave his plays in a permanent literary form does sometimes seem to justify the view that he wrote with no thought save for the success of his play as an acting piece and in the contemporary theatre. Yet there is much in HAMLET that renders such a view impossible ; and we must have recourse to some such theory as the following.² Shakespeare, on the one hand, wrote in order to earn a living ; and on the other hand he wrote in order to please himself, or because the creative impulse within him impelled him to write. But the populace to whom he presented his work, and whose applause he solicited, was to him an object of scorn ; so, if his work was valued highly enough for him to secure a competence upon which to retire, with that he was content. He had gratified his own creative impulse by creating, he rejoiced in his creations, and he did not think of appealing to the judgment of posterity.

¹ See p. 58 n. and references thence.

² This may have been suggested by *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 75-6.

I. This is a most majestic vision, and
Harmonious charmingly. May I be so bold
To think these spirits ?

Shakes. Spirits which by mine art
I have from their confines called to enact
My present fancies.

I. Let me live here ever !

Shakes. By aid of elves, and demi-puppets, and fays,
I have commanded and controlled the winds,
The strong-based earth, and the sea ; I have bedimmed
The noontide sun ; the graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, oped and let them forth,
By my potent art and magic. The characters,
As I have told you, are all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air :
My baseless fabric, my insubstantial pageant,
Dissolves and fades.

I (aside). Ay, when the globe itself,
And all who inherit the globe, dissolve and fade ;
Nowise ere then.

Nothing but the thought of the artist's joy in his own work can explain the scattering by Shakespeare of a profusion of psychological treasures which do not subserve stage purposes, but which just provide intellectual repasts for any number of students reading and re-reading in their study, for whom they were not intended, nor for anybody.

Here stand we, then, men of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ; and ' largesse ! largesse ! ' cry we all, as the regal grandeur of the prince of drama passes along. And though he scorn to heed us, yet all the way has he been scattering, in the prodigal munificence of a Renaissance

monarch, treasure without end, for which we and generations yet to come may scramble: gold, silver, and precious stones; glittering new coppers, too, for those who know not the theory of relative values; and glass beads for the barbarians. The world thus becomes for us all a wealthier place, glorious as the creating of the Order of the Golden Fleece when Philip of Burgundy was wedded to Isabella of Portugal, glorious as that Field of Cloth of Gold whereon there vied in display of prowess and majesty kings who as rivals had aspired to the imperial crown.

THE FIRST ACT

THE first act of a play of Shakespeare's has for its normal function such a presentation of persons and circumstances that as a whole it expresses what might be set forth in some such scientific terms as these: Given characters of this sort and of that, placed in such and such an environment, and correlated thus and thus, what will the outcome be? So soon as the data have been made known, a question such as this thereby suggesting itself, the act terminates. And later on, when we have reached the ending of the play, we should feel that that ending is the natural resultant of the psychological forces set in motion at the beginning. The dramatist, working with the end in sight, with the whole as a whole before him, saw the end implicit in the beginning.¹ So at the close we may

¹ William James writes: 'Great thinkers have vast premonitory glimpses. . . . It is a feeling . . . a feeling of what thoughts are next to arise, before they have arisen. . . . The present image shoots its perspective far before it, irradiating in advance the regions in which lie the thoughts as yet unborn.' (*Principles of Psychology*, Vol. I. pp. 255-6, where see also Mozart's self-analysis.)

And S. H. Butcher writes: 'It is of the essence of a great tragedy to bring together the beginning and the end, to show the one implicit in the other.' (*Aristotle's Theory*, p. 322.)

discern that although we did not during the first act apprehend at all whither the given forces, working under given conditions, would lead, yet, had we fully appreciated what Shakespeare was in that act setting forth, we might have guessed the general lines (at least) which the plot must follow.

Such being the dramatist's reasonable plan, every person that is to take any prominent part in the action must be introduced in the first act; for otherwise there would later on be brought to bear upon the action a force which could not have been reckoned upon from the outset. What Shakespeare does, then, is to set before us the persons, and their environment; and as soon as ever he has done this, he brings the first act very promptly to an end. In any play of his mature years, if he does not proceed precisely thus, there will be some special reason for the exception. In *HAMLET* he follows the usual course.

While such is the function of this act, its normal method is to postpone the introduction of the principal characters until it has first given us a view of the social or political conditions of the time, and place of the action, with just a hint of the position occupied in relation thereto by those who, though not yet introduced, are at once discerned or suspected by us to be the principal characters; and in the next scenes these are themselves brought forward. This method renders the beginning of

the play a true beginning, insomuch that we feel no need at all to inquire respecting what has led up to that which is presented in the first scene, which may be described as itself a sort of prologue. The first introduction of principal characters is by this method rendered very effective; for the lack of an absorbing interest of character in the preliminary scene permits the understanding to be exercised calmly in the apprehension of circumstances and situation, while the imagination is at the same time being attuned to the right pitch by the imaginative appeal of what suggests the atmosphere of the action's time and place; so when principal characters are subsequently brought in, we, being then at no pains to discover the general situation, are free to give ourselves up to the intelligent study of personality.

Thus it is that the opening scene of HAMLET brings before us only minor persons, through whom knowledge is conveyed to us of the recent political history and of the present political and social condition of Denmark. Above all we are given to feel that there is an unsolved mystery, connected with Hamlet, whose name is no sooner for the first time mentioned than the scene closes, leaving us in expectancy, assured that this Hamlet will help to solve the mystery, and prepared therefore to concentrate our attention upon him when he appears.

But we may consider in more detail the contents of this introductory scene.¹ The King of Denmark's liegemen meet upon the castle platform in the starlight. First we **Sc. i.** have Bernardo the soldier challenging the sentry instead of waiting to be challenged, and startled at the first sign of him, quite unnecessarily since he had every reason to expect to find him there. It is as though he for a moment expected that armed man of being a ghost. He inquires whether Francisco has seen or heard anything unusual, and hopes not to be left long alone. The reason for his anxiety soon becomes clear enough, as we learn that he did indeed see a ghost these last two nights, when he and his comrade were 'distilled almost to jelly' (ii. 204) by fear of that 'dreaded sight.' And now with Marcellus has come in Horatio, who does not believe in apparitions. The man who, something of a 'scholar,' half a scholar, attributes belief in such things to superstition, is a familiar figure in cases of alleged ghostly visitations: he only comes to prove that ' 'tis but fantasy ' and that ' 'twill not appear.' In

¹ I venture to beg of serious readers that, besides keeping the text of the play always at hand (however familiar with it beforehand), they would from this point to the end of the book go over a scene afresh, by itself, before reading the corresponding part of the commentary. My paraphrases are not substitutes for Shakespeare. Their appeal is merely intellectual: that of the text is poetical. Their object is to send the reader back to the text more able to understand it, and therefore more open to the free inflow of its emotional and imaginative appeal.

some such cases such a man may see nothing, and may enjoy in consequence a Sadducean triumph: in other cases he may see something surprising. This time the ghost duly appears again; and Horatio, who, as he says, could not have believed on the testimony of others, does believe on the 'true avouch of his own eyes' and 'trembles' and grows 'pale.' His scepticism, which was not very profound, has been suddenly extinguished; and he at once expresses the 'opinion' that the appearance of this 'image' (as he chooses to call it, l. 81) is a political portent, the unrest of the spirit of the late king, or of this 'thing' that has 'usurped' his 'warlike form' (l. 47), being connected somehow with the national 'rummage' and 'preparations' for war.¹ His superior education is then employed to recall an historical instance of similar apparitions; and apostrophising the ghost when it appears again, he follows the lines of popular superstition in the list which he gives of the several

¹ The following quotation from a present-day philosopher is given not as claiming to be a case of apparition similar to that in the text, but merely as illustrating some of the feelings natural to a man in presence of such a phenomenon: 'An intimate friend of mine, one of the keenest intellects I know, . . . writes as follows: ". . . On the third night when I retired my mind was absorbed in some lectures which I was preparing, and I was still absorbed in these when I became aware of the actual presence of the thing that was there the night before, and of the 'horrible sensation.' [The sensations had not been visual, but one was tactile.] I then mentally concentrated all my effort to charge this 'thing,' if it was evil, to depart, if it was *not* evil, to tell me who or what it was, and if it could not explain itself, to go, and that I would compel it to go.'" (Wm. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 59-60.)

possible reasons for which 'spirits' may 'walk,' while without hesitation he now addresses it as the spirit of the dead king, after once, as a sole reminiscence of his original sceptical attitude, inconsistently calling it an 'illusion.' When it has departed, he explains to his friends that he 'does in part believe'—just 'in part' as behoves a scholar—that the holiness of Advent is such as to cause cocks to crow 'all night long' during that season: there is scarcely anything which he could not now 'in part believe.' Now what he and they have witnessed is full of mysterious possibilities, all that seems certain being that the ghost has something to disclose: their thoughts therefore turn to Hamlet the son, upon the first mention of whose name the scene terminates.

Before passing away, however, from this scene, we might direct our attention to the deliberate and formal manner in which Shakespeare approaches his theme. Early in his career as a playwright he found that parallels would be an aid in the presentation of character; that to set forth two or more persons who in similar situations act quite diversely would help him as nothing else would to deal with differences of temperament. The complexity of the character which in HAMLET it is his intention to delineate, leads him to carry the treatment by parallels here further than in any other play. And he commences that treatment

in the very first scene. The parallel here given us is that between Denmark and Norway: just as King Hamlet of Denmark has died leaving a son 'Young Hamlet' (l. 170), so King Fortinbras of Norway has died leaving a son 'Young Fortinbras' (l. 95). If we knew that the death of the King of Norway was not of recent date, but took place thirty years ago, the parallel would be much less noticeable; but of that fact we are not informed at present.¹ In the reading of Sc. i we might not indeed observe that any parallel was intended at all, for it is not as yet forced upon our notice: later on it will be.

Prepared by this introductory scene, we can take an intelligent interest in the more important persons, who are immediately afterwards brought before us. The first to speak, as is proper, is King Claudius. A kingly personage indeed is he; dignity, prudence, tact, and a sense of the serious responsibilities of his exalted position, being all observable upon this his first appearance. In his utterance fraternal affection seems mingled with a sense of the loss sustained by the nation in the decease of his 'dear' and 'most valiant' brother. As some apology may be thought necessary for a royal wedding celebrated during the period of Court mourning, he reminds the Court that he has not acted in this important matter without the advice and approval

¹ Not until Act V.

of Polonius and the rest; and as he does so he tactfully calls their attention by the way to the fact that they really need a capable king (implied in the reference to the 'State' as 'warlike') and one whose claim cannot be disputed (implied in the reference to Gertrude's interests as being merged in his, l. 9). And now to business. The strained relations with Norway shall first be dealt with by a diplomatic representation, in the event of the failure of which the King (we are already aware) is prepared for war: leave of absence is next sought by a courtier and is granted: and then an attempt must be made to alleviate the unpleasantness occasioned by the gloom of Hamlet, but for which all might be merry enough.

'And now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son'—Hitherto standing silent by, that dark figure (l. 68) with a downcast countenance (l. 70) now mutters to himself the enigmatic words, 'A little more than kin, and less than kind.' The primary significance of these words is, 'A little more than cousin, but less than son,' a stepson being in a degree of relationship nearer than a mere 'kinsman,' yet only by affinity, and not in nature or 'kind': Hamlet does not feel like a son of Claudius; he is not of the same 'kind.' But included along with that first and simplest meaning of these words of his, there is another meaning too, 'less than kind'¹

¹ *Less than kind* is the same as *kind-less*, II. ii. 609. Gorboduc was 'in kind a father' to his eldest son, but his treat-

signifying 'unnatural'; for the union which has brought about that relationship is contrary to nature, according to Hamlet's estimate, of which we are to hear more later on. But that his first words should be enough of an enigma to puzzle and mislead, is fitting enough; because as are these so is his character, a character complex to such a degree that when we have got one set of explanations this does not mean but that other sets of explanations may have to be sought along different lines of interpretation.

Now Hamlet's gloom is a delicate matter to deal with. Claudius cannot but feel that it savours as much of moroseness as of sadness, and may be chiefly due to animosity towards himself. The Queen, lacking in wisdom as well as in refinement of feeling, at once discloses the suspicion that this is indeed so, by begging her son to adopt a more friendly attitude towards the King; while as to his father's (and her late husband's) death, she adds that there is nothing 'particular' about that, death being the commonest thing in the world. Claudius must endeavour to make up by prudence and tact for his consort's awkwardness, and although feeling uneasy he is much too wise to show that he thinks of any other cause for Hamlet's gloom than the loss of his father. He is a good enough reader

ment of him was 'against all course of kind.' (*Gorboduc*, I. i. 11 and 18). In Hamlet's remark, some commentators attribute to 'kind' the sense of 'affectionate'; but surely lack of affection is not in question at all.

of character to know that one should speak of things in their ethical and religious bearings when addressing this peculiar person ;¹ so, after 'commending' Hamlet, and saying that it is 'sweet' of him to mourn the loss of his father, he remarks that it is undoubtedly a sense of 'duty' that has made him do so, 'filial obligation' always requiring the son to 'do' some sorrow for a reasonable 'term' upon the decease of a parent ; but he goes on to say that to continue long in such an attitude is 'opposition' to the will of 'Heaven,' it is 'obstinate,' 'impious,' 'peevish,' and 'unmanly,' as well as 'unprevailing.' If it is a father that Hamlet wants, Claudius will be a father to him. Moreover, if an immediate proof of his paternal affection is required, 'let the world take note' that Hamlet is to be regarded as heir to his throne.

Such is the courage of this admirable sovereign. That Hamlet is heir presumptive, we might say, cannot be disputed by any ; heir apparent he would be but for the possibility of his uncle's leaving issue : and all that the King in magnanimity has announced to the world is what was known before. But why, we might ask, should not the positions be reversed, and Hamlet be King with Claudius heir presumptive ? But the priority of Hamlet's claim, according to our modern theory

¹ On the religiousness and strict morality of Hamlet, see further pp. 54-6, 60-1, 83, 140, 143, 174-7, 195.

of entail, has little or no relation to the plot, wherefore it is to be referred to only once, and that in the very last scene of the play.¹ The manner in which Shakespeare has dealt with the situation here is somewhat peculiar. What he has done is to develop a little further the Fortinbras parallel commenced in the first scene, by now informing us that, just like the late King Hamlet, the late King Fortinbras was succeeded by his brother, not by his son. Young Fortinbras, indeed, was but a babe when left fatherless, whereas Hamlet in the like circumstance was twenty-nine.² But this we are not told at present, and the parallel may help insensibly to make us regard as a matter of course the position of Claudius upon the throne of Denmark. But if Shakespeare desires us not to think of Claudius and Hamlet as rival claimants of a crown, he does nevertheless encourage a comparison of a purely personal character. There on the one hand is King Claudius, whose practical efficiency as a sovereign no man will question; and there on the other hand is Prince Hamlet, whose unpractical life is spent abroad in an academic world which is very foreign to Elsinore, and in which he would willingly carry on philosophical studies for a lifetime. Claudius is

¹ V. ii. 65.

² His parents had just completed thirty years of married life; 'thirty dozen months' (III. ii. 167-8). Hamlet's play was performed (III. ii. 136) four months later. Hamlet was thirty (V. i. 177). The father of Fortinbras died the day that Hamlet was born (V. i. 160).

thoroughly sane ; but who will say as much for Hamlet ? There are good grounds for the self-confidence of Claudius. And the declaration now made before the world that Hamlet is his heir is very effective, conveying the impression of generosity and superlative goodwill.

It will certainly, he thinks, be better and safer to keep the strange Crown Prince in Denmark, under the guardianship of himself and the Queen. But Hamlet's yielding to their wishes evokes a remarkably enthusiastic outburst. Why so much fuss ? Why the firing of big guns ? Such delight on the King's part over what he takes to mean that Hamlet is going to be fairly amenable looks like evidence of great uneasiness, as though there had been upon his mind some burden not unconnected with Hamlet. So with magnificent condescension he actually says to him, ' Be as ourself in Denmark ' : and he promises that he will drink to Hamlet's health, little knowing that the drinking of healths Hamlet considers a reprehensible custom, and that the military music (though played in his own honour) he will rudely designate a ' bray.' ¹

Thus the King, happy in the thought of the success achieved by his diplomacy, ' smiles and smiles ' ² upon Hamlet : and at last he and his retinue depart. When they have departed, we are privileged to learn at last the mind of Hamlet, hearing his communings with his own spirit in

¹ I. iv. 11.

² I. v. 108.

solitude. And if we, enjoying now and from time to time henceforth such an advantage, yet fail in the end to understand fully, much more is it to be accepted as natural and necessary that his Danish contemporaries, excluded from such privilege, and dependent for their estimate of him upon external actions and upon words sometimes enigmatical and sometimes commonplace which he lets fall in company, should fail to understand. Here now is Hamlet alone. Here now we can follow the workings of his mind. And we learn—none of the people ever suspected this—that he is mourning, not for his father, but for his mother ; that what makes his ‘heart break’ and life no longer seem worth living is not a sense of personal loss, but a sense of human depravity as exemplified in the re-marriage of her whose ‘frailty’ seems to him to implicate all womanhood. Within ‘two months’ of her first husband’s death, ‘within a month’ of the state funeral, she has married again, and this ‘most wicked’ unfaithfulness to him whose memory Hamlet venerates renders ‘most unrighteous’ all the tears that she shed upon his death. The marriage, being within prohibited degrees of affinity, was (l. 157) ‘incestuous.’ In our generation, it may be questioned whether a man may not marry his sister-in-law, or this woman her deceased husband’s brother ; whether, in fact, there is need to be so strict as to bracket affinity with consanguinity, as has always been done by ecclesiastical law.

No such questioning arose in Hamlet's mind. Shakespeare and his audiences were well aware¹ that the recent internal history and the existing international position of their England turned largely upon that very point, the case of Gertrude being precisely parallel with that of Catharine of Aragon. Such a union was to them illicit. Hamlet, however, is but little concerned about this grave issue; re-marriage, and at an early date, appearing to him so serious as to render it unnecessary to dwell upon the point that the marriage is within prohibited degrees.

Disappointed in his mother, he thinks of humanity as of a 'garden,' dependent upon cultivation for productivity, reverting now to the 'grossness' of nature, its fair flowers of civilisation and order supplanted by the 'weeds' of natural degeneracy. His thought is of coarseness, of lack of refinement; faults rooted in 'rankness' and 'grossness' being especially odious to his cultivated and refined mind, as is evidenced not only by his sense of the shamefulness of his mother's speedy re-marriage, but by his feeling of repugnance for the 'bloat king,'² coarse as a 'satyr,' and, later on, by his particular concern about the vice of inebriety.³ So he cannot but long to have done with life.

¹ Commentators, so far as I have ascertained, have been quite oblivious of this. The point is of some importance in relation to the play, and I have therefore written a further note upon it. See Appendix B.

² III, iv. 182.

³ I. ii. 175; and I. iv. 8-22.

Suicide has attractions, but is not to be contemplated because contrary to moral law in its most permanent aspect as the ' canon ' of the ' Everlasting.' All actions, all projects, whether his own or other people's, are viewed by this man in their moral bearings; as is further to be seen when Horatio, whose entrance puts an end to the soliloquy, describes himself as a ' truant ' from his university studies. Hamlet, to whom study is of the utmost seriousness, cannot but protest against his friend's referring with levity to an offence of so much consequence as playing truant. His seriousness is again shown when, in the next breath, he refers with bitterness, as an advocate of temperance, to the drinking habits of the Court, as being likely to impress the new-comer unfavourably.

The remainder of the scene is taken up with the announcement to Hamlet of the Ghost's appearances. The moment that announcement is made, Hamlet suspects foul play, instinctively reaching what will prove to be the apparition's true significance, which to the other men, in their speculations in Sc. i, did not suggest itself even as one of the several possible alternatives. For Hamlet has by temperament a special affinity for all that is outside the range of merely sensuous experience. And that he has given some particular attention to the peculiarities of occult phenomena is most strangely shown by his inquiry respecting the colour of the beard. For it is known to observers of such pheno-

mena, that the form assumed by the apparition of a deceased person may be not the form in which the person was last seen in the flesh, but some earlier form instead. And although, according to the popular theory of apparitions in Shakespeare's day, such a phenomenon would be wholly inexplicable, it is referred to because reference to any fact of this class is appropriate to the character of Hamlet.¹

It is in detail such as we have here that there is often best revealed to us Shakespeare's unequalled imaginative sympathy, his unequalled power of putting himself completely into the position of any of his characters. If instead of considering Hamlet's part in this conversation we consider Horatio's, the same thing will be observed. We remember Horatio's attitude in the previous scene: we hear what he says to Hamlet now: during the intervening hours we have not followed him, but Shakespeare has; Shakespeare has never lost sight of him. Did they see the ghost's face? 'Oh yes!' Well then, says Hamlet, 'looked he frowningly?' There was something peculiar and characteristic about the frown of the late king, as Horatio's reference to it in Sc. i made us aware. The ghost's

¹ A modern theory started by Edmund Gurney (or was it not started long before by Lucretius?) gives a provisional explanation of this peculiar phenomenon. See Andrew Lang, Art. 'Hauntings,' in *Encycl. Brit.*, 11th ed., for a statement of this theory. See also the interesting book entitled *An Adventure*, by 'Elizabeth Morrison' and 'Frances Lamont' (Macmillan: 1911).

frown appeared to him terrible then, indicating 'anger' and inclination to 'smite' (I. i. 62-3) with his truncheon (ii. 204): but he now tells Hamlet that that is not what it looked like. The reason why it appeared so to him was, he must since have realised, that he was himself in a state of alarm at the moment; whereas calm reflection upon the ghostly figure since has convinced him that the expression was not 'angry' but 'sorrowful' rather. Thus Shakespeare, having followed the workings of the man's mind during the interval of his absence from our sight, and either counting upon our being able to follow them too, or else not caring whether we follow or not, shows us nothing at all of the process, but, casually and without emphasis, sets down the natural result of that process in the change of mind. If he were anxious to secure our understanding him, he might easily have made Horatio say, in response to Hamlet's inquiry about the frown: 'I thought him wroth, my lord, but now methinks 'twas a countenance more in sorrow than in anger.' But Shakespeare will not help us thus.¹

✓ ¹ The passage before us is an early example of this dramatist's conception of dramatic effect. The play affords numerous illustrations of the wide difference between our usual conception of it and his; and I shall have occasion to revert to the subject more than once (see pp. 123-4, 147-9, 164-5, 189-90, 210). When we say 'dramatic' we mean 'histrionic' or 'effective upon the stage'; but much in HAMLET is highly dramatic and yet by no means capable of being set forth by an actor. When Lamb (rightly or wrongly) says, 'The Lear of Shakespeare can-

In Sc. i, as has already been said, the dramatist started the Fortinbras parallel which is later on to be developed. In Sc. ii, as has already been said, he has carried that parallel a little further. But in Sc. ii he has also started another. For two university men stood before the King, each having come from abroad to attend the Court functions, and each possessed of a common desire to leave Denmark and to return to the University. The one was Hamlet, the other Laertes. The comparison between the circumstances and tempers of these two is to be developed in much detail before they finally die at each other's hand: here there has been just the first suggestion of it.

As the curtain falls upon this scene, we pause to consider how much we have learned about Hamlet. If the suicidal tendency already observed should lead him to take his own life, we, sitting at the 'coroner's inquest'¹ would agree upon a verdict of 'Suicide while of unsound mind.' But although it is a legitimate presumption that a man who takes his own life is insane, yet we may not feel very sure what it is that constitutes sanity. And as Hamlet, a much clearer thinker than the rest of us, is to give, later on,² the result of reflections bearing upon that very point, we may postpone further consideration thereof until then.

not be acted,' he does not mean that it is not great drama, but that dramatic value, in Shakespeare's work, is not the same as stage effectiveness. ✓

¹ V. i. 24.

² In the earlier portion of III, ii.

We may, however, ask ourselves now whether it is not possible to discover an origin for this melancholy that Hamlet suffers from, a melancholy so profound that upon this his very first appearance it casts doubt upon his soundness of mind. The specific ills from which he suffers—sense of the loss of his father, regret for the re-marriage of his mother—let us consider whether these in themselves are enough to account for it. Nay, the loss of a parent does not lead a man to suicide. This will not take us to the true source of his gloom at all. What we see here is a man of very strict moral principles, of very high moral standard, applying those principles, that standard, to society as he finds it. Hitherto, in the calm and aloofness of philosophical and theological studies abroad, he has been occupied with the abstract; and now the concrete facts of life have been forced upon his attention. The practice of regarding all things in their moral bearings has now resulted in such a sense of the shortcomings of the world as to make him tend in the direction of pessimism; and this tendency is the stronger for that the person whose shortcomings are most especially in evidence is his mother. There is a melancholy proper to the contemplative man, to *il penseroso*, whose joys are surer, springing from a deeper source, than those of gayer men. To this temper the Elizabethans often referred: ‘Hail!’ they cried, ‘divinest Melancholy.’ Such a temper would be Hamlet’s

by nature, and with it the joys thereto appertaining. But this kind of melancholy is changed into the other kind, through the operation of the force referred to. Moreover, with this force moving Hamlet into gloom there coalesce two minor forces of a nature distinct from this one, but of a similar trend: the one is the sense of personal loss in the death of his father, and the other is the sense of isolation through the impossibility of communion with his mother.¹ His ideals now shattered,

¹ *Note on Hamlet's Usage of the Words 'Madam' and 'Lady.'* —I have already sought to show (p. 58 n.) that Shakespeare's dramatic sympathy, as one may call it, is so great, that he sometimes quite casually puts what is of psychological value into detail more minute than what we are accustomed to take cognisance of. And here is a further example of this.

In conversation with his mother, both in this scene and in Act III, Sc. iv, Hamlet's feelings alternate between a sense of distance between them and a desire to bridge that distance: whenever there is a constrained feeling of impossibility of communion, he says 'Madam' or 'Lady'; and whenever there is the endeavour to re-establish personal contact by an appeal to her, he says 'Mother.'

Act I, Sc. ii. 'Death is common.' 'Ay, *madam.*' 'Seems particular.' 'Seems, *madam?*' Then follows a change: restraint is laid aside, and Hamlet seeks to give expression to his emotions, appealing to her as 'good *mother.*' Afterwards she says 'Stay with my husband and me.' 'I shall, *madam.*'

Act III, Sc. iv. '*Mother*, you caused my father's death.' The Queen, misunderstanding, prepares to defend herself against a supposed charge of murder. Hamlet at once feels the distance, the constraint, as he says 'Ay, *lady.*' Or, again, when he finds her apparently quite unaffected by the presence of the ghost, whose presence and words stir him so deeply, he calls her '*lady.*' But when he prays her to think of her trespass, it is '*mother*' once more.

One word or other is used by him in these two conversations

Hamlet alone in the world finds life not worth living.

What then is the cure for melancholy? What may lift this man up out of his despondency? Here at the outset it might appear simple enough to find an answer to such inquiry. There are two alternative remedies to try: action and passion. In an active life, even within the daily round of the commonplace, the contemplative man will be relieved for part of the time from the presence of his own brooding thoughts, his mind being set to work no longer introspectively, but along the lines of his active occupation with external things. Claudius, with much good sense, has therefore nominated Hamlet 'chiefest courtier'; and, although for that rôle he scarcely seems suited, some other active employment Fate may yet find him. As to passion, which is the alternative, there is one particularly remedial form of passion, whereby the microcosmic soul comes to be concerned no longer with its diurnal rotations upon an internal axis, but now with its orbital rotations around another body attracting according to the law of gravitation and shining as a source of light and life. No better specific can there be found for sixteen times, and scarcely once can 'mother' be substituted for 'madam' or 'lady,' or 'madam' or 'lady' for 'mother,' without loss of meaning.

A precisely analogous case of great interest will be found in the forms of address used by Lady Macbeth to her husband. To trace the process by which she comes to call him—just on one occasion—'sir,' is to trace her life's sad story.

melancholy than the passion of love ; provided always that the love be requited with love, for love unrequited is itself a well-known source of melancholy. This specific shall be given a trial : Hamlet shall be found to be in love.

What next, O Hamlet ? ‘ Death,’ he cried ; but there
The silver answer rang, ‘ Not death, but love.’¹

So it is with particular interest that we look at the lord chamberlain’s daughter, to whom the next scene is devoted. Although, since Hamlet is strange and eccentric, he may **Sc. iii.** not be understood by king and courtiers, although he may not be really known even to his mother, yet true love truly understands and knows. So as we look at Ophelia we reflect upon the infinite possibilities of sympathy and comprehension that lie in her relation with him. Not intellectual activity of a masculine order shall we desire to find in her ; not that, but a feminine capacity for love. Thereby the little maiden may accomplish a great thing, even the saving of Hamlet, who thereafter in his turn some great thing may accomplish.

Now Ophelia’s brother and father, observing this love-making, have independently arrived at a like conclusion. The heir to the throne cannot contemplate marriage with a lady of inferior rank ; so Hamlet will never marry Ophelia : but a

¹ Adapted from Mrs. Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, No. 1.

Prince is allowed much latitude—'a large tether'; so Ophelia is in danger. Her brother naturally approaches the delicate subject with caution: the girl is so likely to resent his interference. He starts by observing that while no doubt she finds Hamlet's attentions 'sweet,' she must not expect them to be 'lasting'; for like the sweet 'violet' of the 'prime,' they will fade. Ophelia never told her 'good brother' about the 'sweetness' of her intercourse with him 'the honey of whose music vows' she 'sucked'¹; yet Laertes seems to understand, so she will trust him. Must she indeed, she wistfully inquires, expect it thus to fade and pass? 'No more but so'? This is a satisfactory beginning, and Laertes is able now to proceed, though cautiously still for a while. The body, says he, is the soul's temple, and as it grows the temple services within increase in grandeur and breadth, the soul apprehending ever higher objects of worship. If Ophelia is able to follow this beautiful figure, it must convince her of his knowledge of life; for what he says, although its direct reference is to Hamlet, is confirmed in the experience of her own adolescence, with the adoring of Prince Hamlet into which it has recently expanded. So Laertes is able to go on. Perhaps Hamlet does love her truly—it is just doubtful—but even so, let her understand, they can never marry, since upon his choice depends the future of Denmark, and he will undoubtedly con-

¹ III. i. 164.

tract a political marriage in due course. Therefore let her not lose her heart. By tact and address having got safely thus far, Laertes is now able to lay before her plainly the danger of seduction. His poor sister says the 'lesson' is a 'good' one, and that she must set a 'watch' upon her 'heart.' 'Dalliance' with the Lord Hamlet, she says, is indeed a 'primrose path'; but it is better to try to get to 'heaven,' though the way, if it involves rejecting his attentions, is very 'steep and thorny.' Undoubtedly, she says, it is the path of virtue that Laertes has pointed out. And is he sure that he himself lives by as strict a rule? Now it does not do to have the tables turned upon one so; and Laertes promptly discovers that he has 'stayed too long,' and must hurry away to the ship. But the entrance of his father delays his departure; and we learn something of the rule of life which he is expected to follow in Paris. He is not to be quarrelsome; but once in a quarrel, he must make sure to get the best of it. He is to spend upon his clothes all he can afford, bearing in mind that Parisian models should be followed, Frenchmen being 'select' in taste, as well as 'generous' in expenditure, in the matter of dress. These and other practical 'precepts' are given him by the 'man of wisdom.'

When Laertes has gone, Polonius addresses himself to the subject of Hamlet; but how different is his manner from that of his son. Laertes spoke

of the Prince familiarly as 'Hamlet'; but Polonius would no more be guilty of such impropriety, when addressing his daughter, than would Ophelia herself at any time: he and she will never fail to give 'Lord Hamlet' his proper title. Laertes was cautious and polite; but Polonius 'goes roundly to work,' and scolds Ophelia for a 'green girl' and a 'baby.' Does she believe in these 'tenders' of love? The poor child answers—after Laertes' discourse how could she but answer?—that she does not know what to think. The vehemence of her father's reproof does wrest from her a slender attempt at the defence of her lover and herself; but she will sorrowfully carry out his injunctions, and will 'talk with the Lord Hamlet' no more.

The one whom Polonius and Laertes suspect of the worst intentions towards this girl is the one whose scrupulousness with regard to sexual relations we have already found to be so great that it might be deemed extravagant. Yet these men are not much to be blamed for so misjudging Hamlet; for, having no opportunity of knowing that extraordinary person well, all they could do was to apply to his case the ordinary standards. Why, we, with opportunities so superior to theirs, have erred in our estimates of him often.

Ophelia's situation is now pathetic indeed. By the Crown Prince, the 'State's expectancy,' the 'observed of all observers,'¹ who could have taken

¹ III. i. 160-4.

his choice among all the maidens of Denmark, words sweet as 'honey,' sweet as 'music,' have been addressed to her. What heart of courtier's little daughter would not respond to the glorious flattery of the heir-apparent's love? So with all her little heart, with all her little mind, Ophelia loved Lord Hamlet; and, as we might already guess, she used her best endeavours to attain such graces of demeanour as would enable her to respond more worthily to the attentions of her lover. What direction those endeavours took, and what His Royal Highness thought of them, we shall find out in course of time. But with all her little strength she loved him. And now her father and brother, who, after all, must know so much more of him than she does, have told her that the intercourse must cease and have told her the reason why. What, having thought it over in solitude, she will conclude, and what, having come to a conclusion, she will do, are questions that we cannot yet decide. Possibly she may recognise, upon reflection, that 'dalliance' is not the word to apply to her relation with Hamlet, and that she is the one who really knows him best. But it is just suggested already that they may both, perhaps, have been mistaken in their choice, and that it may be of little use to each other that they will prove to be. Pathetic although the situation of Ophelia is already, it is possible that it will become much more so ere she die.

We pass on to the scenes of the encounter with the ghost. Hamlet and the others, awaiting its arrival, engage (as is natural) in general conversation, which is very soon turned by **Sc. iv.** Hamlet, after his manner, to the moral issues of life and character. Especially is he concerned about the Court 'revelry,' and the national fault of inebriety, to which he made previous reference¹ upon first meeting with Horatio, who was unfamiliar with the manners of Elsinore. He speedily forsakes concrete examples of depravity for a general and more abstract review of the harm entailed to 'particular men,' who are in other respects 'virtuous,' by some particular 'defect' in character. A defect, says this philosopher, may be due to heredity, which counts for so much that a man may be said to be marked from the beginning for servitude, clad from 'birth,' as it were, in a 'livery' supplied by 'nature'; which he says could suggest the distinction between 'original' sin and 'guilt,' since a man cannot be held responsible for congenital tendencies. Or, again, the defect may be due to a weakening, through one-sided development, of the controlling power of 'reason,' which may occur by a sort of chance, by what might be described as the baneful influence of 'fortune's star.' Or, lastly, the defect may be due to a 'habit' resulting from affability or the endeavour after 'pleasing manners'; which last class is

¹ I. ii. 175.

upon further reflection found to be really a subclass of No. 2, so that, in the recapitulation which follows, the threefold classification is reduced to a twofold. The analysis is affected throughout, general though it is, by the particular 'vice' of drunkenness, which started the discourse. Natural 'virtues,' he continues, even developed so highly as to resemble in 'purity' the supernatural effects induced by 'grace,' may abound in the individual; and yet his neighbours may have to take special cognisance, to his prejudice, of his 'particular fault.' Thus, lost in thought, the thinker lets himself wander on, until suddenly recalled from his abstraction by the ghost's approach.¹

¹ When the ghost first entered, in Sc. i, it interrupted Bernardo: there is no reason whatever for expecting it to wait this time upon Hamlet's leisure; and his sentence, I believe, breaks off without its principal verb. *Eale* = *evil*, just as *deale* (quarto text of II. ii. 628) = *devil*, or as *e'er* = *ever*; *of a doubt* = *by a doubt*; and there is no end to the sentence. The note in Furness's 'Variorum' edition, occupying six and a half pages, summarises the different views of over fifty writers, without exhausting the number of emendations and explanations now to be found. A similar case will be found in *THE TEMPEST*, III. i. 14-15, of which passage Furness (devoting to his summary of the comments eleven and a half pages) says: 'This passage has received a greater number of emendations and staggers under a heavier weight of comment than, I believe, any other in Shakespeare.' The passage is:

'But these sweet thoughts do even refresh my labours,
Most busy lest when I do it.'

It appears that not one commentator has observed the stage-direction which follows; at any rate not one has been as much struck by the entrance of Miranda as was the lover-at-first-sight. He never finished his sentence:

'Most busy lest when I do it——' (*Stage-direction*) '*Enter Miranda.*'

It is of interest that Hamlet, startled, and acting upon a characteristic impulse, first utters a prayer for his and his friends' defence from supernatural powers of evil, invoking the aid of supernatural 'ministers of grace.' For the meaning of it is that although, had he been asked beforehand what he was expecting to see, he would have replied, reasonably, that it was 'his father's spirit in arms,'¹ and although he has been awaiting its approach in a similarly reasonable frame of mind, yet as he is brought right into the presence of what though not unexpected is full of mystery, questionings assail him, feelings and thoughts surging in his consciousness and jostling each other. Orthodoxy was naturally disposed to suspect apparitions to be supernatural beings coming more probably with 'wicked' than with 'charitable intent,' and assuming human appearance as they are obliged to do in order to become visible to mortal sight.² This explanation is no sooner grasped at by Hamlet in his excitement than the conviction of the ghost's identity causes it to be relinquished. Next comes the thought that this looks more like a body than a soul, and is to be addressed as a 'corpse' come out of the 'ponderous' tomb, rather than as a disembodied spirit; for how should a spirit have the form of a man in the flesh and wear what looks like 'steel'? 'Nature,' he says, is making 'fools' of us by phenomena of this

¹ I. ii. 255.

² Upon the character of the apparition I have written a note, with reference to its appearance in Act III. See Appendix D.

sort. Yet he feels that this really is a spirit, and 'immortal'; and he feels, further, that his own 'fate' (l. 81) is somehow involved. So Hamlet goes out, leaving Horatio to observe that his 'imagination' has got the better of him, an observation appropriate enough to Horatio in the days of his scepticism, but at this stage somewhat fatuous: he adds, 'Heaven will direct it,' but whether 'it' is to be referred to the ghost, the 'issue,' or the 'state of Denmark,' Marcellus could not be expected to know.

The spirit, 'dumb' to others, has a voice for Hamlet. Now it might no doubt be said to any one of us with truth that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of **Sc. v.** in our philosophy, though the remark is particularly appropriate when addressed, as here (l. 166), to the honest-hearted man predisposed to confine credence to the obvious. Nevertheless what we have in this scene is not in accord with experience. If voices come at all from the other side of the veil that hides the life beyond the grave, they scarcely bring communications so definite as that received by Hamlet. To him, susceptible in a special degree to impressions not wholly sensuous in origin, a form might well be visible and a voice audible while his mother would think he was but 'bending his eye on vacancy' and 'holding discourse with the air.'¹ The inherent improbability of the circumstance is in some measure lessened by

¹ III, iv. 117-18.

the fact that it is only Hamlet that hears the ghost's communication. What is of chief importance, however, is to note that it is only to circumstance that the improbability relates: *circum*, around, *stans*, standing: circumstance is what surrounds and forms a setting to life and life's issues. And probability of circumstance is often sacrificed by Shakespeare, but only that he may the more truly set forth what he conceives as constituting the truth of life.

The information received by Hamlet through the colloquy is serious indeed. His mother is guilty of adultery, and his uncle of treachery, and fratricide, as well. The 'weeds' in the 'garden' of Denmark are much more 'rank and gross' than he was aware when we heard him speak of them. And now the duty which in primitive conditions devolves upon the next of kin has devolved upon Hamlet. He would indeed be 'dull' if he were not to 'stir in this': 'bound is he to revenge this foul and most unnatural murder.' This having been made clear, with all the detail of the tragedy vividly set forth, the ghost then goes away.

At least it disappears from sight. Soon afterwards, its voice is to be heard from beneath by them all, intervening in their conversation. And as nothing can be more unusual than for a group conversing to be thus interrupted by a ghost, unseen and uninvited, issuing a useless command, we may well inquire what good purpose the dramatist

supposes to be served by this further departure from verisimilitude. Before, there was a necessity for suspension of probability, that Hamlet might receive detailed information ; but now no similar necessity exists. So the incident, as it stands, has appeared absurd to many. Yet if the word 'swear' be indefinitely prolonged in the utterance, it may be made peculiarly suggestive of the indeterminate 'gibber' appropriate to a ghost. If Shakespeare did not expect (rightly or wrongly) that a weird effect could be thus produced, the incident has no meaning at all. We had weirdness in Sc. i and in Sc. iv : but the colloquy in Sc. v has brought the ghost into a sensuous order in which it is not in kind distinguishable to the imagination from any more tangible actor in life's drama ; its departure is but as the exit of any other. We must suppose that the weird sound from the underworld is expected to make it now resume its place in the order of the supersensuous and mysterious.

We are, however, anticipating, and must revert to the soliloquy in which Hamlet engaged as soon as the ghost disappeared. When mention was first made of his duty to avenge, he had readily expressed his goodwill :

Haste me to know it, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.

How many readers and writers have quoted these

words as evidence of Hamlet's good intentions, and how few¹ have found in them evidence of his impotence! That is because the 'wings' of readers and writers are too 'swift' for 'meditation' upon Hamlet's words. There are other figures that he might have used: he might have said—and it would suit the blank verse just as well—'with wings as swift as wings of eagle swooping upon his prey.' But the wings to which he refers, while striving to express an intention to fly swiftly, are the only ones he possesses, are the brooding wings of 'meditation.' See Meditation, in her 'wonted state,'

With even step, and musing gait.
And looks commercing with the skies,
Her rapt soul sitting in her eyes . . .
Forget herself to marble.²

Is anything more leisurely?³ And as to 'the thoughts of love,' they are but a variant of meditation. For the ebb and flow of love-thoughts takes up time: wakeful nights are longer than nights spent asleep, and days of dreaming pass slower than days spent astir. Hamlet's words convey no suggestion of speed at all, but the reverse. For Shakespeare, with a touch of an irony that will

¹ None hitherto, as far as I have ascertained.

² *Il Penseroso*.

³ If any reader still hugs the fancy that meditation is 'swift' (as the commentators have supposed), let him turn to Hamlet's meditations: I. ii. 129-59; I. iv. 13-38; II. ii. 576-634; III. i. 56-89; IV. iv. 32-66; &c.

in increasing measure mark his treatment of his hero, makes him, in the very words with which he expresses the readiness of his will, express unawares his impotence. The active must by him be translated into the contemplative ; doing must be referred to as though it were thinking. And now, since Hamlet used those words expressive of his good intentions, all the details of the fratricide have been declared, in support of the injunction to ' revenge ' ; and that physical injunction is itself now wholly ignored in Hamlet's soliloquy, its place being usurped by its mental equivalent, which is the merely subsidiary exhortation to ' remember.' That is an injunction which can be carried out ; as for the other, Hamlet instinctively and involuntarily shuns it for the present and postpones its consideration. ' Now to my word,' says he ; ' it is '—not ' avenge me ' but—' remember me.' Then, to increase the irony of his appearing to ignore so very soon the whole purport of the ghost's visitation, we find him impelled to pass from the very conception of the King's criminality to a ' bookish saw,' a logical induction from experience ; the concrete and particular fact of Claudius a fair-seeming villain has given place to the abstract and general truth that appearances deceive. ' So, uncle, there you are,' he says, as he sets down in his note-book that ' one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.' It is as though he said : ' the abstract truth is so much greater than the concrete example ; all particular occurrences of

the phenomenon, including this case of Claudius, are embraced within the general statement.’¹ And this he thus sets down when he has only just declared his intention to erase from memory all such ‘bookish saws,’ all such generalisations—‘forms’ is the word for generalisations—in order to have before him for the future his father and not the abstract. But the nearest approach that Hamlet can well make to keeping the concrete before him is to write down in the concrete note-book abstract remarks. He feels it to be his duty to do something. In fact it is his duty to dispose of his uncle. So he does dispose of him, in his note-book: ‘So, uncle, there you are.’ He feels that it must be his duty to pull himself together, and to meditate upon abstractions no more; but instead of doing this he lets himself go, and acts upon the lines of his natural bent in writing once more in his commonplace-book. This is the madness of Hamlet.

Now ‘on earth there is nothing great but man, and in man there is nothing great but mind.’² The physical is the common heritage of man and the brute, but the mental places man on a different plane. Slaying may be done by a brute, while contemplation of life and apprehension of truth in

¹ The tendency thus to generalize has already been noticed in Hamlet’s discourse at the commencement of Sc. iv.

² Hamlet may have said something to that effect; but I quote the words from Sir William Hamilton (*Lectures on Metaphysics*), who quoted them from Joannes Picus Mirandulanus, who in his turn had quoted them from one Phavorinus.

the abstract are the prerogatives of man alone. And well might Hamlet defend abstraction by saying :

Sure he that made us, . . .
 gave us not
 That capability and godlike reason
 To fust in us unused.¹

But the truth is that meditation is among the luxuries of life, whereas physical activity, including, occasionally, regicide, is among the necessities. Luxuries must be forgone in conditions such as prevail in Denmark, and be reserved for a more settled order and a more advanced stage in civilisation. Failing these, meditation is an amenity to be enjoyed only by dwellers in monastic seclusion ; and while the University of Wittenberg may furnish the requisite atmosphere, the Court of Elsinore cannot. Danish society, modern and Christian as to its outer garb, has underneath the cloak of modernity—like much of Renaissance society—crude passion and primitive crime. Here, amid the rough-and-tumble of elementary facts, the abstract and universal should be left unconsidered, the concrete and particular should engage attention. For what though thinking leads to knowing ? Knowledge is not power. It is not contemplation that is wanted now, but action. The situation, then, is this : an idealist has been brought of a sudden face to face with actuality, and finds himself called upon to play a man's part in a simple and primitive form of life's conflict.

¹ IV. iv. 36-9.

And in Denmark in the days of Hamlet idealism will surely fail as signally as it did in Egypt in the days of King Akhnaton.¹ For Hamlet, characterised by a scrupulous morality, and possessed of the

¹ Comparison between Hamlet and that first of idealists (*ob.* B.C. 1359) may be of interest as suggesting that Hamlet was true to type. For my acquaintance with Akhnaton I am dependent upon his *Life and Times*, by A. E. P. Weigall (Blackwood, 1910), to which work the chapter and page references in this note relate.

The Pharaoh gathered the artists of his day, and caused them to reform their art (Weigall, pp. 69-70, 75, 207), saying to them (as in Act III, Sc. ii), 'The end of art is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature, to show virtue her own feature, and the age its form and impress.' His dislike of the unreal showed itself also in relation to the formalities of Court life, which seemed to cut him off from friendship (pp. 213 *sq.*, cf. II. ii. 228 *sq.*, and III. ii. 61 *sq.*); so that when inferiors, bowing to him, said (as in Act I, Sc. ii) 'Our duty to your honour,' he said, 'No, your love, as mine to you,' or if one said (as in Act I, Sc. v), 'After you, my lord,' he said, 'Nay, let's go together.' He dwelt much (pp. 122-8) upon the beauty of 'this goodly frame, the earth' (as in Act II, Sc. ii), making particular reference (pp. 72, 122-6, and Chap. IV) to its 'excellent canopy,' the 'majestical roof fretted with golden fire.' Seeing human life as it was, he knew well how different it ought to be. Deploring especially (as in Act I, Sc. ii, and Act III, Sc. iv) the low standards of the day in the matter of sexual morality, he sought (pp. 167 *sq.*, 208 *sq.*) to set an example of pure domestic life. He spoke of Providence (Chap. IV), saying (as in Act V, Sc. ii) 'there is a special providence in the fall of a sparrow,' or, to keep closer to the original, 'in the birth of a chicken.' He thought (as in Act IV, Sc. iv) 'Sure, he that made us with such powers of reason, looking before and after, gave them not to fust in us unused;' so he wrote poetry (pp. 79, &c.), continued his studies in philosophy and art, and sought to teach the knowledge of God. He was loved by the populace (p. 83; cf. IV. vii. 18); and he hated war (pp. 223 *sq.*; cf. IV. iv. 27-9). His kingdom went to pieces, as Hamlet's would have done had he been king; Hittites and Amorites misbehaved with impunity, the empire decayed, and Akhnaton died a failure. After him reigned the dynasty of Fort-in-bras, who, scorning ideas and idealism, raised the fallen glory of Egypt.

highly nervous temperament often associated with great refinement, is peculiarly unfit for primitive conditions, is as unfit as an academic mind of the twentieth century for the primordial responsibility of the avenger of blood, a responsibility from which civilisation relieves the individual. 'Revenge,' said Bacon,¹ 'is a kind of wild justice, which the more man's nature runs to, the more ought law to weed it out.' His thought is that to which Hamlet has already given expression ;² that society is a garden, in which 'wild' things must not be allowed to spread : and among these things 'wild and gross in nature,' Bacon says, is revenge itself. Made for a critic of the civil garden, for a preacher of its ethics, Hamlet is called upon to sow in that garden this destructive weed. Made for something immeasurably better than Danish politics and regicide, he finds those to be his uncongenial sphere and this his burdensome duty.

Hamlet was not left long to soliloquise before Horatio and Marcellus arrived ; and upon their arrival his behaviour became eccentric. For the nerve strain necessarily associated with so thrilling an experience could not but be followed by reaction and loss of control as soon as the tension was relieved and contact with common life re-established. 'Wild and whirling words' marked that reaction : 'an antic disposition' was the immediate consequence of that strain. For nerves are like springs : after stretching them out, let go, and reaction will

¹ Essay, 'Of Revenge.'

² I. ii. 135-7.

carry so far that they will vibrate for a while and behave in an 'antic' manner before recovering the position of rest.¹ From such nervous excitation some relief may be found in prayer, to which (l. 132) Hamlet naturally feels disposed to resort; that excitation is testified to in the meantime by jests and levity. A few minutes of this eccentric behaviour suffice to give him a feeling—not a clear thought, only a vague feeling—of its congruity with his state of emotional disturbance. Heretofore there has in his heart been passion and in his mind a sense that he must hold his tongue (ii. 159), while his demeanour has been marked by a measure of eccentricity: henceforward the heightened passion that will pulsate in him, accompanied still by the sense, under more distressing circumstances, that he must keep silence yet a while, will result in recurrent nerve-strain and reaction, and in an increased measure of eccentricity, a nearer approach to madness, a more 'antic disposition.' So he persuades himself that it is his resolution to put on such a disposition—that that is deliberate which is in fact spontaneous, or, rather, automatic.² The only

¹ Shakespeare sympathised with Hamlet: he himself felt just as Hamlet felt. For after the nerve-strain of *MACBETH*, Act II, Sc. i and ii—where the strain was probably greater than anywhere else in his tragedies—his genius lapsed into the antic disposition of Sc. iii.

² One is confronted by two difficulties in critical analysis such as this. The first is that one wishes to use in a precise and scientific sense words which are in daily usage in a vague sense. The second is that the language of philosophers itself

strictly volitional element in it is what one might call negative ; for it would require an effort of will for him to behave in a conventional manner, and he might be said to be resolving not to make any such effort. He lets himself go—resolves to let himself go. But what excuse could he suggest to himself for his supposed resolution, or what end could he think to attain thereby ? It can only be that as the aloofness which is the natural concomitant of unconventionality has enabled him to be an onlooker in relation to the lives around him, so the more perfect insulation resulting from a more unconventional manner is to enable him yet more freely to carry on his observations. Nor is the hope of this on his part altogether vain ; for it is indeed in the presence of Hamlet in his madness that the characters of all others are to be perfectly revealed. It is particularly to be noted that what he has resolved—

lacks regularity, the same word being used in different senses. By 'spontaneity' I mean unreflective activity which is the outcome of temperament. But 'spontaneous' may seem to be by this definition synonymous, in the context, with 'impulsive.' Therefore 'automatic' is better. What I mean can be conveyed aright only by recourse to technical terms such as I do my best to avoid in the text. Hamlet's 'antic disposition' is the physical reaction to a certain nerve-stimulus. Such reaction is normally unconscious, only coming into consciousness by being reflected upon. Thus not only is his behaviour not voluntary, as he supposes it to be, but it does not even belong to the ideo-motor class, which includes impulsive actions: it is reflex, and I suppose that among reflex actions it belongs to the 'emotio-motor' sub-class, to use the term applied by Baldwin (*Dictionary of Philosophy*, art. 'Reflex Action') to such phenomena as sighing, blushing, &c. With regard to the 'automatic,' see, further, pp. 233-4.

putatively resolved—to do is really the outcome, not of any new need, but of innate predisposition: the observation of the characters of men, from the sequestered standpoint of an outsider, is what would suit him best, apart altogether from the exigencies of any special situation. Thus we have here what corresponds precisely with the note-book incident. There was the undefined sense that it was incumbent upon him to do something or other, not merely to think: what then should he do? Write in his note-book! Now again, he must be doing something, must be planning: what shall he do? Put on an antic disposition! What the situation demands might be said to be in each case the exact reverse: for as to the note-book, he himself recognised, just before adding one more to his list of 'records' of general 'impressions,' that it would be appropriate to 'wipe away' all such; while as to the antic disposition it must be manifest that, for him to live up to his newly-found vocation, he should now resolve to be eccentric no more, to be sober, rational, practical, for the future. Yet the feeling that something is being done, that some step really has been taken in what it is to be vaguely hoped may prove a right direction, will serve to disburden Hamlet's mind; will thus also, alas, facilitate postponement.

Hamlet has certainly shirked facing the clear issue; but there is one observation of his—one only—which shows that the true nature of the

demand made upon him presses up out of sub-consciousness into consciousness :

The time is out of joint : O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right !

Here—and, so far as concerns Act I, here only—is the full sense of the burden of a known responsibility for which the speaker knows himself unfit. A moral reformer Hamlet is indeed by temper ; and if reform is to be brought about by preaching, none then so fit as he ; but if by strenuous deeds performed in the physical arena, then is it far otherwise. Responsibility sometimes is the making of a man, and sometimes it is his unmaking. Hamlet here under the stress of his responsibility appears to deteriorate already. For this very religious man, who (l. 132) desires to go and pray, who is careful (l. 180) to distinguish grace from mercy,¹ and who (l. 187) says ‘ God willing ’ with regard to actions in futurity, now irreligiously curses his birth.

And it will happen, that this particular man,
By the o’ergrowth of one complexion
Now breaking down the pales and forts of reason,—
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect
(His virtues else being as pure as grace,
As infinite as man may undergo)—
In general opinion may take corruption
From that particular fault : the dram of evil
May all the noble substance cause to be doubted
And changed to scandal.

¹ The only other character of Shakespeare’s who makes this distinction is the pious and ineffective Henry VI.

For suppose it should come to this, that the hero, characterised by great refinement, becomes obscene ; that the hero, charged to avenge the death of one innocent person, occasions the deaths of several innocent persons ; that the hero, scrupulously moral, becomes indifferent to homicide—suppose it all should work out thus, what then should we say ? What but that never in the world of art was there irony greater than this ! But of what sort is the evil thing the ‘dram’ of which may thus spoil this good man ? ‘Heavy-headed revel,’ ‘swinish gluttony’ ? Nay, but apparently the excess of that the possession of which is man’s chief glory, and the measure of which in the individual determines the individual’s rank. The ‘complexion’ whose ‘o’ergrowth’ may work him so much mischief seems to be intellectuality. Is such grim irony disconcerting and bewildering ? What then if Shakespeare should make out the wisest, most thoughtful, most scholarly character in all drama, to be at the same time, and none the less, insane ? Would that disconcert and bewilder us yet more ?

Very possibly. Yet to be bewildered in the labyrinth of human life and mind is not our end : if we wander on, and twist and turn, and find ourselves back where we were before, to start afresh, and turn and turn again, perchance the mocking laugh of the master of irony who sits supreme may so unnerve us as that we conclude both life and Shakespeare to be derisory and scoffers only ; then our

wanderings will have been vain. But should that laughter serve perchance to egg us on instead, then may we yet find our way some-whither, and learn the tracking of Shakespeare's labyrinth on to the revealing of the arcana of destiny there within. All we wanderers in that maze are familiar with the feelings of bewilderment; they come because we have not got to the end.

No right understanding of Hamlet will be attained without first forgetting much of modern criticism and resolving to meditate afresh upon the text. Why is Hamlet going to be a failure in the end? Because of his attitude in relation to circumstance at the beginning.¹ And that attitude has not been sufficiently described when one has represented Hamlet's predisposition to be engaged with things of the mind as unfitting him for a strenuous life in the physical arena. For there is a definite defect which has its seat in Hamlet's will, and this has yet to be dwelt upon. In the first scene in which he appeared, he was contemplating the attractions of suicide. Now suicide is the relinquishing of all endeavour, the letting oneself go; an act of the controlling will, it yet is the will's renouncing of control. Persons who thus behave are reputed to be of unsound mind, because sanity consists in self-control. Insanity is the 'loss of the power of co-ordinating

¹ 'It is of the essence of a great tragedy to bring together the beginning and the end. . . . The causal chain so unites the whole that the first ἀναρχία bears the weight of the tragic result.' (Butcher, *op. cit.*, p. 322.)

the ideas and feelings, and in the wise development of the control of will over the thoughts and feelings there is a power in ourselves which makes strongly for sanity.' ¹ Hamlet, before ever he got the ghost's revelation, was disposed to let himself go—he was therefore predisposed to insanity. And then came that fateful interview which Horatio declared beforehand (iv. 73-4) might tend to loss of control for Hamlet, and even to suicide.² Such loss of control he knew to be a natural result of the strain involved in an interview alone with a ghost. And it was the result which actually ensued, being evidenced in the antic disposition of Hamlet before the close of the scene. The feeling of its being pleasant thus to let oneself go ³—for be it remembered that he had a tendency in that direction beforehand—resulted in his resolving to do so again from time to time. He told Horatio and the others that he would voluntarily 'put on' such a disposition, just as he might be said to commit suicide voluntarily: but in either case the action consists in will's vacating its throne. 'How far, then, is a man

¹ H. Maudsley, M.D., *Responsibility in Insanity*, 3rd ed., pp. 268-9. See also, on this subject, the observations of Hamlet himself, which are dealt with *post*, pp. 152-3.

² 'It is generally owing to hearing some voice saying, "Go and drown yourself," or "Go and shoot yourself," that most of the numerous suicides among spiritualists have been brought about.' (Dr. C. Williams, in *Spiritualism and Insanity*.)

³ There is no difference in kind between (a) the note-book incident (see pp. 75-6), (b) the eccentric behaviour of Hamlet when his friends come in, and (c) his supposed resolution to put on an 'antic disposition.'

responsible for going mad? This is a question well worthy of deep consideration.'¹ Unable to decide upon a course of action, Hamlet decides upon what will mean a course of inaction; unable to resolve to hold himself together, he resolves to let himself go. Under the stress of circumstance, will has been dethroned, and it is not possible long to escape the penalties of a weakening of will.²

We have come to the end of the first act. Character has been outlined, and environment. And although there is no need to anticipate much, yet it is natural to peer into futurity and speculate as to the outcome. For while the first act's function is to present, explicitly, character and its environment, as an introduction to the action that will occupy succeeding acts, yet it cannot help in effect containing more than that, not explicit but implicit. For in character related to environment there is an implication of destiny, and in the beginning is involved the end.

¹ H. Maudsley, *op. cit.*

² With regard to all criticism of this sort I can suppose some one asking, Do you mean to say that Shakespeare meant all this? The answer is, No; but I mean to say that what Shakespeare has written means all this. The difference is considerable. See, on this subject, p. 5. See also Mr. Bradley's *Lectures on Poetry*, pp. 171-4, a passage of much value in this connection; though I must add that in my judgment the distinguished author goes a good deal too far, and overstates the important truth.

THE SECOND ACT

WATCHING Shakespeare the artist at work upon the intricacies of a plot such as that of KING LEAR, one might be reminded of Laocoon in Agesander's famous group. There at either side of him are the children of his imagination, entwined by the convolutions of coils so intricate, so involved, that at first one can scarcely tell which is which of the tortuous ones that threaten to crush his children and him. But Shakespeare, thus agonising, glories, for the end for him is to be mastery and success, and the creatures of his fancy are really not to be destroyed.

Now the play that we are studying stands in marked contrast with a play of that intricate character. Here there is no complexity of plot, there are no divided interests. Our whole concern is with Hamlet. Although all other characters interest too, yet it is only in their relation to him that we are concerned with them. As we go from scene to scene, from act to act, it is Hamlet, Hamlet, Hamlet. When, early in his career, Shakespeare had written the tragedy of RICHARD THE THIRD, he had similarly limited the interest to one outstanding character. But what a change in his art since those days!

Then, the interest was the simple and obvious interest of the heroic, and of a man who is resolute ; now it is the difficult and thought-compelling interest of the non-heroic, and of a man who is irresolute. Then, the limitation of interest was accompanied by simplicity of characterisation ; now, the limitation is necessitated by the vast complexity of characterisation. It is because the personality of Hamlet calls for the exercise of all our mental powers that the plot has to be simple and the interest limited. This limitation and that simplicity notwithstanding, labyrinthine complexity of character renders this play the most complex of them all.

The proper function of the second act is to start what may be called the action proper, for which the first act has been the preparation. For an example of a perfectly normal structure, one might turn to the tragedy of *MACBETH* ; Act I comprising the temptation to murder Duncan with a view to securing his crown, and terminating the moment Macbeth is able to say, ' I am settled ' ; Act II comprising the successful accomplishing of the murder, and terminating as soon as Macbeth has gone off to be crowned. This is a simple case. The structure in *HAMLET* is quite analogous to that in *MACBETH*, and is indeed just as normal ; but its character is less evident, because of the difficulty of a plot which, throughout the first half of the play, has as its very abnormal content (the result of the hero's very singular temperament) inaction rather than action.

Taking into consideration this peculiarity of the plot, it will be seen that when Hamlet said,

The time is out of joint : O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right !

his words, being a confession of unreadiness, correspond precisely, as an ending to Act I, with Macbeth's declaration of readiness in the words ' I am settled.' In the same manner, Act II, with its suggestion of aimless drift, is in perfect accord with the character of the hero who just lets himself go, and ' walks for hours together in the lobby ' reading ; and thus it corresponds, hero for hero, with Act II of MACBETH, and its definite volume of content. It is in like manner appropriate that the words with which this act in HAMLET closes do not signify a step forward, but rather the reverse ; for the suspicion that perhaps King Hamlet was not murdered after all, with the postponement of further action until that difficulty has been resolved, suggests a point psychologically anterior to that which was attained in the words that closed Act I, seeing that those words expressed the sure knowledge of the facts and the sense of responsibility to act in view of them.

Much of the second act in its two scenes—rather more than one-third of the whole act—is occupied in developing further the subject

Sc. i. of Hamlet's relation to Ophelia, although we never yet see them together. From Ophelia's words to her father we learn that Hamlet

has called upon her. 'Oh, my lord, my lord,' when he came to see me he came without his hat, and looking so very untidy! His countenance was 'piteous,' and he 'sighed.' What said Ophelia? Did she say, 'You are not merry, my lord'? No, she said never a word: for she was 'so affrighted,' and she could not think why he had called or what he could be wanting; though she 'truly feared,' she says, that he wanted her to love him. One thing, indeed, she did feel inclined to say, when he looked at her long and earnestly; and that was, Why 'such perusal of my face,' my lord? You look 'as if you would draw' my portrait! That, at all events, was what it seemed like to her after he had gone. But perhaps her father will explain to her what it all means. Polonius, then, reflecting, wonders whether Hamlet's conduct could be accounted for by any 'harsh' treatment on Ophelia's part? Certainly not, she replies; she only 'repelled his letters and denied his access' to her; that was all!

During that interview it was not only Ophelia that remained silent, but Hamlet too. There was no need for him to speak, as from her 'affrighted' face he learned enough to make him sigh 'a sigh most piteous and profound' ere he departed. Now it is easy, upon reflection, to understand the state of his feelings when he sought her out in her seclusion. Sensible of isolation, and of the weight of his new burden, what he was in need of above all else was sympathy. By communing with one whom he

loves, a man so situated may get relief, may get strength to do or to bear. In appearance Hamlet had altered for the worse; in demeanour he was more eccentric; yet,

Love is not love,
Which alters when it alteration finds.

Ophelia, when repelling him of late, was probably not a free agent: her action would probably be due to the suspicion of Polonius, whom Hamlet would inform upon the earliest opportunity¹ that he was well aware of his suspicion. He would go to Ophelia, clad, for the purpose of obvious symbolism, in the distracted lover's conventional garb;² and if, undeterred by his exaggerated strangeness, she could extend to him the support of her loving sympathy, the isolation would not any longer be so complete. Thus it was that the interview took place; and without a word spoken on either hand he learned that there was no hope for him there. Ophelia was frightened. We are to learn later on, not yet, to what feeling Hamlet attributed her fright; and he may have been mistaken. But the only approximation (not a very near one!) to the telepathy of love was that, to Ophelia, Hamlet,

¹ II. ii. 185-7.

² It may serve as an illustration of Hamlet's 'madness,' if I remark that it was quite the regular thing for the distracted lover thus to 'put on' an 'antic disposition,' that is to say, to let himself go, just as Hamlet habitually did. Hamlet ought to have wanted, upon the occasion of that interview, to render it possible for Ophelia to understand him in some measure; but that would have required a different attitude on his part, and some self-possession.

preoccupied with the result of the visitation of 'a ghost loosed out of hell to speak of horrors,' appeared, as she informed her father, to be just like a ghost of that character himself.

How indeed should the poor girl understand him? His love-letters, to judge by the published specimen, were such that she might well be excused for considering them unintel- **Sc. ii.** ligible. People wiser than she have found that specimen hard to understand. Even the simple epithet, 'beautified,' commentators have always misunderstood, one of them suggesting that it is a misprint, the word 'beatified' being what Hamlet really wrote and what Polonius thought so vile, the rest explaining that here (even if here alone) 'beautified' is only a variant for 'beautiful.'¹ Yet the word is properly capable of only one meaning, namely, 'rendered beautiful,'¹ and it need not have caused so much trouble, seeing that this is only one of three several occasions upon which Hamlet made reference, direct or indirect, to Ophelia's attempt at improving, by the use of cosmetics, upon the face that God had given her. Polonius understood the word very well; and Ophelia had good reason to feel aggrieved. For was it not for Hamlet's own

¹ It is the word that would be used in III. i. 51, but for the exigencies of metre, which cause it to be abbreviated to 'beautied.' Greene described Shakespeare as an upstart crow 'beautified with our feathers.' That certainly did not mean 'beautiful,' but embellished. In such a phrase as 'To the most worthily honoured and virtuous beautified lady,' it means embellished with virtues, &c.

sake that she was beautified? In order to have and to hold the love of a Crown Prince, one would naturally have recourse to 'painting': but it is not pleasant to have it referred to by one's lover thus; his words sound like mockery.

He wrote her a love poem; but it was far from being a simple song of the type of 'Bonnie sweet Robin is all my joy.'¹ What did he mean by the words—

'Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love'?

'Never hesitate to believe that I love'—that is all right: but—'even though you hesitate to believe other things that seem certain, such as that truth is a liar'; that seems the natural way to paraphrase the line, but it makes no sense, for everybody knows that truth is not a liar. Well, the word 'doubt' sometimes has the meaning of 'suspect'; will his lines make better sense that way? 'Even if you are so suspicious as to suspect truth of lying'—that is all right this time; then in the next line also the word should mean 'suspect'—'but never suspect me of loving!' Lackaday, what can he mean? Is he mocking? It is not fair to play upon words in that fashion; and it is little wonder if the girl says to her father, 'I do not know, my lord, what I should think';² for had ever little maiden so perplexing a lover?³ Ophelia was to Hamlet but as a

¹ IV. v. 187.

² I. iii. 104.

³ The time of the writing of this letter is generally held to

very pleasant toy to play with, though he was himself unaware that that was all she was to him.

Now, soon after the reading out of his love-letter by Polonius to the King and Queen, Hamlet comes along reading a book, and upon encountering Polonius he at once seizes the opportunity to tell the old man that he could read his heart, and knew well why Ophelia had been kept out of his way : ' Let her not walk in the sun ; she is in danger of seduction ; friend, look to it ! ' There were other people's hearts, too, that Hamlet was to prove able to read.

Attempts on the part of Hamlet's friends to solve the riddle of his strange demeanour, and to discover a cure for him, are all the while being carried on. When, in Act I, the question arose, what might cure melancholy, the answer was that there were two alternative remedies to try, action and passion. Since then, Hamlet has been found to be under the influence of the passion of love ; and responsibility for serious action has been laid upon him. His gloom is not alleviated. There is another remedy to try, namely amusement. It diverts ; and diversion is what is needed, diversion from gloomy thoughts. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

have been earlier than the beginning of the action represented in the play ; and it is worth noting that Hamlet, when he wrote it, was in the mood in which, toying with the thoughts and feelings of others, he would amuse himself by using enigmatic language to hide (instead of revealing) his mind. Cf. I. ii. 65 ; I. v. 118-25 ; II. ii. 170-220 ; II. ii. 409-38 ; III. i. 103-15 ; III. ii. 98-118 ; &c.

are two 'good gentlemen' who are not distinguishable from each other, because whichever of the two speaks first, the other follows up what he has said by saying (if possible) precisely the same thing in different words. Entreated (ll. 1-39) to undertake the task of 'drawing Hamlet on to pleasures' and of 'gleaning' from him what it is that 'afflicts him thus,' they 'laid their service freely at the feet' of both their Majesties. 'Thanks, Rosencrantz and gentle Guildenstern.' 'Thanks, Guildenstern and gentle Rosencrantz.' So they set forth with a prayer that their 'presence' may prove 'pleasant' to him and their 'practices' 'helpful'; and to their prayer the Queen added her 'Amen.'

These two have no difficulty in jointly framing a hypothesis that will fully account for Hamlet's state of mind: it is altogether due to his not having succeeded his father upon the throne of Denmark! Now their course is clear: if he admits that he 'lacks advancement,' they will remind him that he 'has the voice of the King himself for his succession in Denmark';¹ and they will counsel him to amuse himself in the meantime: he will take their advice, and they will win the King's prize. So when he says (ll. 247 sq.) that 'the world' is a 'prison' for the confining of the spirit of man, and that 'Denmark' is a prison, No. 1 says he quite understands; it is because Denmark is 'too narrow' to afford scope for Hamlet's political 'ambition.'

¹ III. ii. 354-7.

Hamlet then says that, to his mind, happiness and its reverse consist not in circumstance but in 'thinking'; that the realm he would wish to be 'king' of is the realm of his thoughts, but that his kingdom is spoiled through his thoughts declining into 'bad dreams.' Yes, says No. 2, and the 'substance' with which your 'ambitious dreams' are concerned is as elusive as a 'shadow'; as though he said, give up dreaming about a crown that you cannot possibly secure at present. No. 1 adds a further hint about the vanity of ambition. As, by hypothesis, all Hamlet's thoughts revolve around kingship, he is to understand their drift no matter how vague their language. As in fact, however, his thoughts are not of that sort at all, he does not know what they are talking about. Afterwards, having reflected upon this portion of the discourse, he will understand very well what they must have meant.¹

The conversation then drifting, Hamlet tells these friends that he no longer enjoys the things in which he would normally seek enjoyment, namely contemplation of the beauty of nature and contemplation of man. Seeing that he belongs in point of time to the Renaissance, the new appreciation of glory in 'earth' and 'firmament,' of 'beauty' in

¹ The result is that the next time he meets them (III. ii. 354-9) he pretends to give them an explanation of 'the cause of his distemper,' attributing it to what he has now realised that they attribute it, namely, desire to obtain the crown. This corresponds precisely with what we have had in II. ii. 180-7, when Hamlet told Polonius that Ophelia was in danger because he knew Polonius thought so.

the human 'form,' of 'god-likeness' in human 'reason,' is naturally shared by him with the rest of the humanists. But now all the onlooker's pleasures fail him. 'Weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,' seem to him all the uses of this world.¹ That is how it was in Act I; that is how it is still. The world then was 'an unweeded garden,' now it is 'a sterile promontory.' In between there have been the ghostly visitation and the terrible disclosure; but these have in no wise altered Hamlet's frame of mind. If the deeply interested onlooker at life—humanist, humorist—is at the same time a very serious moralist, then the obliquity that will engage his attention as a spectator may turn his pleasures to pain. Bright hopes in humanity, hopes awakened at the Renaissance, tend to change to disappointment and despondency. Such was Hamlet's case in Act I, and such is his case still.²

'What lenten entertainment,' then, these courtiers say, 'the players shall receive' from this gloomy Prince. Not at all: 'they shall be welcome'—ever so welcome.

He took the suffering human race, . . .
 And said, 'Thou ailest here, and here' . . .
 He said, 'The end is everywhere;
 Art still has truth, take refuge there.'³

¹ I. ii. 133-4.

² He has 'forgone' all his customary 'exercises': he does not tell them that he has taken to practising fencing instead, an important fact, of which we are not informed until much later. See pp. 214-15.

³ Matthew Arnold, *Memorial Verses* (on Goethe).

The onlooker, interested in life, is interested also in the art that represents it ; and if defects in life as it is lived spoil his pleasure therein, he may fall back upon the representation of life in art, his pleasure in which may yet remain unspoiled. It is in the two forms of art whose representation of life is most direct that Hamlet is given opportunity of showing his special interest ; these being the art of the dramatist and the subsidiary art of the actor. We even find the Prince to be on terms of some familiarity with the actors themselves ; but as he (ll. 391-3) remarks that his manner towards them calls for some comment, it may be expedient at this point to digress into a consideration of Hamlet's manner towards his acquaintances generally, whereby we shall incidentally discover the grounds of his uneasiness about his manner towards the actors.

A Crown Prince, when at a university abroad, may make friends on quasi-equal terms with men of congenial temper whose social position is not his ; but in the Court life at home this may be impossible because all around him are possessed of a proper sense of the difference of social level. If he is of a princely nature, he will enjoy the resulting sense of exaltation, and it may be that he will make a benevolent use of the resulting opportunity for condescension ; but if he is otherwise constituted, and has more of common humanity than of princeliness, he may yearn to reach, by breaking down

the barrier of social convention, a plane which he can occupy in common with his friends. This was exactly Hamlet's case. His naturally affectionate disposition found itself confronted in its outgoings at Elsinore by the artificiality of class distinctions. The insistence upon externals, the courtly formality, which necessarily accompany these distinctions, would even under ordinary circumstances arouse in Hamlet, with his love of sincerity and openness, some feeling of repugnance. It was in such a spirit that when Horatio came in and said (I. ii. 162) 'your servant ever,' Hamlet replied, 'No, I call you friend; or let us change names, let me be your servant ever and you call me friend.' But the new circumstances that have since arisen must make Hamlet feel much more eager than before to remove the social barriers; for the pressure of his new burden must make him, feeling his 'weakness' (l. 630), reach out for the support of love, or (failing love) of friendship. It is for this reason that, the next time we hear him address Horatio, he will be much more effusive than upon the first occasion. But that eagerness, on the part of this lonely man, quite regularly induces an attitude of very demonstrative friendliness when he meets acquaintances. And thus it is that even Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are greeted in this manner. With regard to them there is this also to be said, that when one meets those whom one knew in childhood one feels as if the acquaintance with them were intimate in

character ; though in truth the divergent development that has taken place since the days of youthful equality may be so great that one is really poles asunder from them, in which case a renewal of outward intimacy is quickly followed by a revelation of the divergence, so that after a short time one feels that association as schoolfellows does not really constitute so great a bond after all. That is the story of Hamlet's relation with these two.¹ Upon this their first meeting at Elsinore, he is, on the ground of early acquaintance, demonstratively friendly. Upon future occasions when they are

¹ Long ago, 'of young days' (II. ii. 11), they were 'school-fellows' (III. iv. 202) of Hamlet's ; of more recent days they were 'neighbours' (II. ii. 12) when he was at home. Claudius paid compliments admirably (as in l. 2)—compliments of a different quality (one may add) from the fulsome ones that were characteristic of Gertrude (cf. ll. 19-21)—and he would know that any suggestion of intimacy with the Prince would flatter these men. But his words are borne out by the meeting between them and Hamlet. For Hamlet had been with them in Copenhagen (ll. 341-2), where they attended the theatre with him ; but that was several years ago (ll. 442-8). They still lived in the city (ll. 341-75), but had been fetched somewhat hastily (ll. 3-4) to Elsinore (ll. 278 &c.). Hamlet described that fortress-home of his as a 'prison' (l. 247) ; but when they, probably thinking the word might give them a clue to the Prince's state of mind, expressed surprise and asked for an explanation, Hamlet replied, why, Denmark itself is a prison ; and it is because he had already passed from the criticism of Elsinore as a prison to that of Denmark as one, that they 'cap' his criticism by suggesting that the world itself must in that case be a prison.

It certainly is not suggested in the play that they were fetched from Wittenberg, or from abroad at all. It is to Elsinore, not to Denmark, that Hamlet welcomes them thrice (ll. 278, 387, 573).

This note is intended as a reply to Mr. Bradley's disconcerting suggestions in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Note B.

seen together, the sense will be found to be growing upon Hamlet that they really have nothing in common, until in the end with unjustifiable severity he will condemn them to the penalty of death.

Now with regard to his attitude towards the actors, what he says (ll. 388-93) is that he finds it necessary to surpass himself in demonstrativeness towards friends in order to distinguish his relation with them from his relation with the actors. This is because, on the one hand, there is no such desire for intimacy with the actors as with the men about the Court—it is not from this travelling company that he wants sympathy and friendship's support ; while, on the other hand, he feels that one's relations with actors are peculiar in character, these people being by their very profession demonstrative, and one's demeanour towards them being therefore liable to be marked by an exaggerated familiarity.

Fate ' did not better for their lives provide
Than public means, which public manners breeds.'¹

This familiarity, Hamlet would wish his friends to understand, must not be taken as having any significance.

So the players come in, and Hamlet asks them for a speech, selecting a passage the style of which has caused unnecessary difficulty. Why, it is asked, did Shakespeare here introduce a passage quite different in style from what he usually wrote ?

¹ Sonnet cxi.

The answer is so simple : it is that Hamlet's taste and Shakespeare's differ. It is perfectly natural that what Hamlet should be acquainted with is drama in its pre-Shakespearean form : for he and all his circle are dead ; they belong to an earlier generation. And what Hamlet asks for is a declamatory passage such as those which abounded in the pre-Shakespearean tragedy of 'English Seneca.' But there is also to be noted what is of much more importance. Hamlet himself tells us (l. 456) that the play that he liked failed as an acting piece : his own approval, and that of other persons of academic 'judgment,' did not secure for it any success. 'Addicted' to 'retirement,' 'sequestration,' they had formed theories of literary excellence, but 'the art and practic part of life' was not 'the mistress to this theoric.'¹ Thus, very unlike Shakespeare's group, Hamlet and his friends were literary theorists, appreciating declamatory writing modelled upon the late Roman work of Seneca. This fully explains Hamlet's taste, so far as concerns style.² And it also explains an extraordinary

¹ HENRY THE FIFTH, I. i. 51-8.

² 'Affection, means 'affectation' ; and 'there were no sallets in it' means 'it was not spicy.'

Hamlet's love-letter contained the equivalent of 'sallets' ; and it was not 'an honest method.' On the other hand his work in the sub-play (whereof anon) was 'modest' and free from 'affectation.' But this may be explained by the manner in which it was composed (on which point some information will be found in the Appendix, p. 266).

He liked the theory of sobriety and self-possession in *art* ; as he told the players in III. ii. : he liked that theory in *life*

inconsistency in his remarks about the play from which he selects a passage to recite. For the character of that play does not accord at all with his own description of it : he says that it is ' modest,' and it is not ; that it is without ' affectation,' and it is full of it ; that it is ' very much more handsome than fine,' and the reverse is really the case. It is strange but true that his criticism corresponds precisely in this peculiarity with general Elizabethan criticism which follows these classical lines. All the academic people who affected classical models resembled Hamlet in this. Their theory was made up of genuine classical principles such as he sets forth ; and if asked what work they ' chiefly loved,' as exemplifying these classical principles, they would point you to Senecan rant, which, just like Hamlet's example, did not exemplify the principles at all.

We have yet to consider the subject-matter to which he turns with such avidity. There is one theme whose interest is supreme : it is the slaying of a king. Around the slaying of a king all Hamlet's thoughts ever revolve ; so in this half-dramatized epic the most attractive passage of all is that about the death of Priam. ' Begin at the line which says

too, as he told Horatio in the same scene. He admired most what he himself lacked. Before the close of the scene which we are considering, he (to borrow his own words to the players in III. ii.) is going to prove able to ' tear a passion to tatters, to very rags,' in his soliloquy. He always found it easy to let himself go. And the sensational passage to which his mind reverts is one that suits his present temper perfectly.

“Amloth ferocious as a tiger.” No, it is not exactly that, but it certainly relates to ‘Amloth.’¹

The rugged Amloth, he whose inky cloak,
Black as his purpose, did the night resemble
(His thoughts being bloody or being nothing worth).
Shall have his dread and black complexion smeared
With heraldry more dismal : head to foot
He shall be total gules ; horridly tricked
With blood of uncle, mother, and, to boot,
Old eavesdroppers and others whose defeat
Shall by their own insinuation grow :
For dangerous ’tis when baser natures come
Between the pass and fell incensed points
Of mighty opposites. But lo ! his sword,
Which was declining on the silvered head
Of his regal enemy, seems in the air to stick ;
For now the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought.
So, as a painted tyrant, Amloth stands,
And, neutral ’twixt his will and the matter in hand,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of his cause,
Does nothing !
Yet all occasions do inform against him
To spur his dull revenge. And oft we see
A silence in the heavens, a death-like hush,
Is to a dread storm’s region-rending thunder
But the precursor. So, after his long pause,
‘Amloth ! revenge !’ may set him new a-work :
And never did the Cyclops’ hammers fall

¹ ‘Amloth’ may be taken as the name of the ‘Hamlet’ of the early legend, which (as everyone knows) formed part of the raw material which Shakespeare utilised. My purpose in substituting ‘Amloth’ for ‘Pyrrhus’ is to bring the matter of the recital into more obvious relation to Hamlet’s situation. With the same end in view, I have introduced into the speech some words and lines, germane to the matter, taken from I. ii, II. ii, III. i, III. iii, IV. iv, V. ii.

On Mars's armour, forged for proof eterne,
With less remorse than his too blood-stained sword
Will fall at last on the King.

'Prithee, say on!' says Hamlet, 'say on! What we want to get at is the effect that all this will have upon the Queen!'

But who, oh who should see the mobled queen—
If she saw Amloth make malicious sport
In mincing with his sword her husband's limbs,
When he had found him drunk asleep, or swearing,
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed—
And Amloth fattening region kites with his offal—
The instant burst of clamour she would make
(Unless things mortal move them not at all)
Would stir the gods to passion.

From this passage, and from this passage alone, we learn in which of its aspects chiefly the prospect of killing Claudius has affected the mind of Hamlet.¹ His imagination has caused him to dwell upon the concomitants of the deed, upon what one might designate its 'inseparable accidents' rather than its 'properties.' They are hideous. Especially is he concerned about the passage relating to Hecuba, about the horrible effect, that is to say, that the

¹ Hamlet's alleged feelings of 'danger, difficulty, dishonourableness,' in the deed required of him, are advanced by some critics as principal, and are admitted by sounder critics as subsidiary, deterrents from the action. As I have said in the Preface, I feel bound to restrict myself, if I can, to the contents of the text: and in it these things are not to be found. But this passage reveals a genuine deterrent of quite a different kind, and one that is profoundly characteristic of Hamlet, although undiscovered by that more original criticism which, counting upon its own resources, wanders from the text.

deed would have upon his mother : her cries at the sight of him stained with her husband's blood would be most terrible. \ The bloodshedding and screams, so ugly to sight and hearing, would be naturally felt to be appalling and unnerving by the refined and sensitive mind of Hamlet. But there is more to be said. The horror of it all, without ceasing to be repulsive, fascinates. Though the mouse would shun the cat, yet unavoidable occupation with the danger may cause it to fascinate, so that losing self-control the mouse may walk right into the jaws of death. ' That he is mad 'tis true, 'tis true 'tis pity.' And the fascination of the normally repulsive is a recognised feature in insanity. Hamlet, who deploras military zeal that leads to deaths of men,¹ must hate and shun the deed required of him, for its ugly bloodiness ; yet, unavoidably occupied with the unpleasant subject, he may in his lack of self-control be drawn to worse deeds of blood : shrinking from slaying one, he may become the slayer of seven or eight before the end. ' Mad let us grant him then,' as one of his victims said.

Hamlet now proceeds to select something else from the player's repertory for performance ' to-morrow night.' The theme is bound to be regicide or something equivalent thereto ; for one case of regicide that has recently been, and one case that is shortly to be, occupy the paramount place in his interests evermore. What he selects is a modern

¹ IV. iv. 27-9.

play, dealing with the social conditions of Italy in the Renaissance, of contemporary Italy, in the state of which, as in that of Denmark, there is something rotten. Instead of the old-world, and heroic, *Slaughter of Priam*, we are to have the modern, and more sordid, *Murder of Gonzago*. And Hamlet's love of art, and his preoccupation with a not-dissimilar subject in real life, lead him to propose interpolating 'a speech of some dozen or sixteen lines.' Readers of Shakespeare, and commentators, have at this point closed Act II, and gone off to Act III, searching busily there, but in vain, for those twelve or sixteen lines which never were written.

The marvellous ingenuity which we students of Shakespeare all exercise as to the meanings of abstruse passages, or the right readings of corrupt passages, is quite equalled by the marvellous difficulty which we all experience in hearing what Shakespeare is saying, sometimes, in passages neither corrupt nor apparently abstruse; and this is perhaps the most curious of the many curious features of Shakespearean study. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who, standing by, heard Hamlet say he would insert a few lines into *The Murder of Gonzago*, might well, when they saw the play acted on the morrow, speculate, had they but the wit, as to which were the few lines that he inserted. But since Shakespeare has condescended to let us listen to soliloquies of Hamlet's unheard by the Danes, why should we behave as though by us too

these were unheard? Why fancy that Hamlet's plan to make the criminal 'proclaim his malefactions' occurred to him during his interview with the players, since his own words (ll. 617-25) state that it most naturally occurred to him only after they had left? As soon as he thought of that, he relinquished the notion of interpolating a few lines in *The Murder of Gonzago*, resolving to substitute for that an original play of his own composition, in which the death of King Hamlet, in its every circumstance or but very slightly idealised, should be set forth. All this we are told.

Of all this, more anon. But at this point we may well pause to draw up a complaint, couched in general terms, against the dramatist; for when we fail to understand him, it certainly is often his own fault. We are expected to be intellectually alert enough to follow, during the performance of a play, things that as a matter of fact no intellect is alert enough to follow; things that leisurely and laborious study of the play line by line at home may fail to ensure our apprehending. But are we indeed expected to understand, or is it rather that this inscrutable person does not care whether we do understand? As

the loftiest hill
Who to the stars uncrowns his majesty . . .
Spares but the cloudy border of his base
To the foiled searching of mortality;¹

¹ Matthew Arnold, *Sonnet to Shakespeare*.

so Shakespeare scorns to explain to us things great or small, leaving us to puzzle them out as best we may. If we hesitate after all to lodge a complaint against him on this score, it is because intellectual enjoyment of a high order is derived from puzzling over what he has left obscure. But it must, one might think, have been detrimental to the success of his plays as stage-plays to contain so much that nobody could follow; and Shakespeare's friends might well have urged him at least to construct a stage version of HAMLET, in which many things would have been made clearer: this could be done, as they might have pointed out, at the cost of changes for the most part merely verbal; and the changes made could be such as still to leave scope for more varied interpretation of characters than is permissible in drama written by any other than Shakespeare. Two or three other points they might have asked him to attend to at the same time. Why should he not, for example, abridge by cutting out a quantity of matter that could not be effective in the performance of the play, instead of leaving it to managers to cut somewhat promiscuously? ¹

The passage which has led to these reflections

¹ The play is too long. The dramatist when writing it had work in hand that was too important to allow of his stopping to think about the Globe Theatre, or else he would have made it shorter. The constructing, in the case of a play of Shakespeare's, of a stage version differing from that which we are to read in our study, finds its complete justification in the assertion of the wide difference, for Shakespeare, between dramatic and histrionic effect. (I revert to the subject, in relation to the passage before us, p. 124, and see references thence.)

is a very remarkable case: for although, once Shakespeare has been shown to have said that Hamlet relinquished the thought of interpolating a few lines into *The Murder of Gonzago*, it may possibly seem clear, yet the most intelligent readers have hitherto failed to see it.¹ How easily he might have made it quite clear, and have saved us all our search for the lines that never were written, by merely omitting Hamlet's last words to the First Player before sending him off after Polonius. But he refuses to come thus to our aid.

There is much to learn from a detailed study of the soliloquy in which Hamlet here engages as soon as he is alone. His first soliloquy, which occurred upon the withdrawal of Claudius and Gertrude in Act I (I. ii. 129 sq.), was marked by many interjections and exclamations, the expression of a profound emotion combined with (l. 159) a vague helplessness. The second soliloquy (I. v. 92 sq.) was characterised by a set of more violent exclamations—apostrophes to heaven and earth and hell, appeals to his heart and his sinews—which ought to have been more forcible than those in the first soliloquy, as being the expression of a profounder emotional disturbance, a greater excitement; but which were in reality less forcible²—what is called strong

¹ See, for a summary of earlier comments upon the passage in question, Appendix C.

² The effect is weak enough for it to have been suggested that those lines (92-3) were not written by Shakespeare but by an earlier writer, and were left there by Shakespeare's negligence. It is only too easy to make suggestions of this sort;

language is often a sign of weakness—than those previous ones, as being the outcome of a more thorough sense of helplessness. Now the third soliloquy, which is the one before us, starts in a more reflective tone, as Hamlet has first to institute a comparison between, on the one hand, the player's demeanour in relation to his situation, and, on the other hand, his own. The comparison inducing a mood akin to that in which he was when the second soliloquy commenced, a mood (that is to say) of emotional excitation combined with helplessness, he thereupon, as in that previous case, 'unpacks his heart with words' and 'falls a-cursing.' Relief, in that previous case, from the sense of helplessness, and consequently from the excitation, was found when an action suggested itself, the action being, however, only the writing something in a commonplace-book : relief, in the present case, is also found when an action suggests itself, the action being less irrelevant, less indefensible, but also consisting only in writing something.

Hamlet's contrast between himself and the player is not merely defective ; it is erroneous in every detail. Whether what he says as to the player's probable behaviour under given circumstances be considered, or what he says as to his own failure under the like circumstances, it will be found that he is equally mistaken. He commences the contrast

we are all tempted to it, but our powers of resistance in the presence of such temptation vary.

by saying that the actor's 'soul' so 'worked' that his 'visage' became wan, his 'aspect' was 'distracted,' and his whole appearance 'suited' that of a man greatly perturbed in mind. All this for the imaginary Queen Hecuba; whereas Hamlet cannot do as much for the real Queen Gertrude. Is it true? Is Hamlet's 'aspect,' then, not also 'distracted'? 'What,' he continues, 'would the player do'—

Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech.

Is not Hamlet also capable of 'horrid speech'? Is he not presently going to 'unpack his heart with words and fall a-cursing'? Why, player, 'an thou'lt mouth, he can rant as well as thou.'¹ He proceeds to say that the player's behaviour would be such as to 'make mad the guilty,' 'appal the innocent,' 'confound the ignorant,' and 'amaze the eyes and ears' of the audience. All this is what he thinks he is himself unable to accomplish: but it is precisely what he is accomplishing, save that it may not be the 'guilty' Claudius but the 'innocent' Ophelia that will go 'mad.'

In error as to his own inaction, Hamlet is equally in error as to the action of the player, who would, he says, had his father been murdered, behave thus and thus: 'he would drown the stage with tears,'

¹ V. i. 306-7.

and so forth. Everything that Hamlet says this man, the appropriateness of whose behaviour he would wish to emulate, would under given circumstances do, is the very contrary of what ought under the circumstances to be done. Therefore every detail mentioned ought to be exactly reversed : and what he ought to say would be more like the following :

What would the player do
Had he the motive and the cue for action
That I have ? He would doubtless leave the stage,
And set himself, relinquishing his art,
To convict the guilty, reassure the free,
Enlighten the ignorant, make the matter clear
To the very faculties of eyes and ears.

But what he speaks of is ' the motive and the cue for passion,' not ' for action.' It is remarkable that he should say ' passion,' because the word ' cue ' is a stage-term, meaning that the moment has arrived for the actor to take his part in the action, not in the passion : his part may be ' a passionate speech,' but it is action still. It is especially remarkable that he should on this occasion use the wrong word, because not only ought he to have, but in a sense he really has, action before him ; he himself, he complains, ' a dull and muddy-mettled rascal,' can ' say nothing ' ; ' saying ' being manifestly a form of action, not of passion. But the word ' action ' was particularly unattractive.

Clearly conscious that his own behaviour is not

what it should be, conscious, but more vaguely (because he cannot think satisfactorily in terms of action), that action based upon passion is what is wanted, the only kind that he is able to think of being passionate speech, Hamlet examines himself (ll. 598-608) to discover some moral quality to which the practical shortcomings are to be attributed; and he concludes that that quality must be 'cowardice'; a conclusion which leads him into difficulty, however, for to the vice of cowardice his conscience, cross-examine it as he will, refuses to plead guilty.

Pausing now, at the centre of this wonderful soliloquy, we might ask ourselves what it means, what the significance of Hamlet's lack of perspicacity may be. We find it hard, with Shakespeare's help, to understand Hamlet: even Shakespeare, perhaps, found it hard to understand him: Hamlet himself finds it impossible to understand himself. Better able than other men to read the hearts and motives of others, he is yet quite unable to read his own. But the explanation is not far to seek: it is that his whole life has been altered beyond his recognition. Made for a philosopher, he has been put into the situation of a politician; made for a moralist, he is required to be a manslayer; suited for the production of theory and idealism, he is asked by Fate to produce energy and practical efficiency. Hamlet the observer of life, spectator of the activities of men, is himself in a situation in which he is worth observing: he has therefore

turned his gaze upon himself, and what he has found he fails to understand. This fair plant has been by Fate removed from its proper place and replanted head downwards, roots in the air ; and the observer, observing it so, finds it hard to recognise. So strange is his situation that at first he cannot even tell himself what sort of behaviour would be appropriate to one so situated ; which is the reason why, inclined to attribute appropriate behaviour to the actor because he acted well, he really attributes to him behaviour wholly inappropriate. And it is for the same reason that afterwards, looking at himself and his conduct from the standpoint of an outsider, and knowing himself to be a failure, he cannot discover a true cause for the failure, and says he can only attribute it to cowardice.

The significance of the earlier half of the soliloquy having thus been made clear, that of the latter half may be more easily apprehended. The contrast which Hamlet has sought to draw between himself and the actor, and the sense that he has of his own shortcomings, kindle afresh emotional excitation accompanied by the sense of helplessness ; so that he has now reached a condition corresponding with that in which he was (for example) at the commencement of the second soliloquy ; and the like cause producing like effect, Hamlet on this occasion as on that 'unpacks his heart' with interjections and passionate exclamations (ll. 608-9). And although, having a difficulty about conceiving of any action

other than speech, what he complained of was that he was himself unable to 'speak' on behalf of his father murdered; yet into his words there now enters (l. 610) the thought of slaying Claudius. In the closing scene of Act I, the ghost said 'Revenge'; before the close of Act II Hamlet has so far progressed as to quote that word for the first time.

He was, as usual, letting himself go, when unpacking his heart with those passionate words; but the thought of revenge has pulled him up, and he blames himself for lack of control. He must not talk; he must act. First he must make plans: 'set about it,' he therefore says to his 'brain.' His 'brain,' promptly obeying, arrives, after a pause represented by the sound 'hm' (l. 617),¹ at the decision that the action is to consist in the writing of a play.² The outcome when passion came upon him was 'words, words, words.' But he checked himself in his speech, and now he has decided to undertake more definite action, and to write a play. 'I'll

¹ This curious line reads:

'Fie upon 't! foh! About, my brain! Hum, I have heard'

Many editors omit the 'hum,' making its omission in the folio text their excuse: for it appears only in the quartos. But how could this word have found its way into the line if not put in by Shakespeare? It even spoils the scansion. Folio changes which rectify quarto scansion are suspect.

² Having, since writing thus, studied Act V, I can add that he would himself describe the process by saying that 'ere he could make a prologue to his brains, they had begun the play.' See *post*, p. 225.

speaking to him again.—What will you write, my lord? — “Words, words, words.”—Indeed how pregnant sometimes his replies are!’¹ But there is to be an important difference of quality between these words and those others, which he has complained of on the ground of their being ‘drab’-like, ‘scullion’-like, unsuited for an educated man: now we are to have instead something artistic, something as good as the Pyrrhus and Priam passage. He complained that, in contrast with the actor, he could ‘say nothing’: since then he has ‘said,’ but in a form not to be commended: now we shall see whether indeed he cannot ‘say,’ and in a form really artistic. The play that he is to write is to be as effective in relation to another as the actor’s declamation has been in relation to Hamlet: it is to have the admirable effect of making the ‘guilty creature’ Claudius ‘proclaim his malefactions.’

Thus even as in Act I the ghost’s declamation resulted in an impulse towards activity, which resolved itself into ‘remembering’ and writing; so now the player’s declamation has resulted in a like impulse towards an activity which, first appearing to consist in passionate speech, then, though only for a moment, in ‘vengeance,’ finally resolves itself into the writing of a play. There are several forms of activity for which Hamlet is particularly suited: the speculative activity of the philosopher, the didactic activity of the preacher, the perceptive

¹ ll. 192-4, 211-12.

activity of the spectator, the critical activity of the student of art, the artistic activity of the dramatist.¹ Is not that a wide enough range to meet the requirements of Fate? Why expect, in addition to that, the activities proper to an heir-apparent, a politician, an avenger of blood? But he will do the best he can. Love of Art, something of the artist's impulse towards orderly self-expression, led him on account of his preoccupation with a murder to propose inserting a few original lines in *The Murder of Gonzago*. The intention was relinquished and forgotten when the new feeling arose that revenge

¹ This passage is perhaps open to criticism. For my assumption has been that the popular antithesis between the active and the contemplative is not valid, contemplation involving mental activity; but there is more truth in that antithesis than I have allowed. Thus Fénelon, in his *Spiritual Letters*, writes: 'What I most desire for you is recollection, and a tolerably frequent pause. . . A state of continued mental activity. . . dries up the inner life.' These words, it is evident, contrast contemplation and mental activity. The will is not much in exercise in contemplation; that is to say, the attitude is one of passivity. And it is because passivity involves receptivity that this attitude is inculcated by spiritual writers, and also, it may be added, by spiritualists. See too, upon this subject, Wordsworth's two poems, *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned*. Passive contemplation is vain except in so far as the objects contemplated help, through it, to form the character, that is to say to give a bias to the life; and life is activity, not passivity. The tendency to contemplation often characterises genius; and the receptivity may result in the 'inspiration' of poet or prophet, so that the passive attitude may have an active outcome in poetry or preaching. So might it have been with Hamlet in ordinary circumstances. On this subject, see, further, p. 241. But in the extraordinary circumstances in which he found himself, the will-less-ness proper to the contemplative genius continued to characterise him; and in those circumstances this could not but prove disastrous.

was what was wanted, and that anything he was to do must bear a more definite relation to that. The decision to write a play will afford Hamlet relief. 'Prompted to his revenge by heaven and hell,' as he puts it, he has found an excuse for not following the 'promptings' just yet; for he now suggests to himself that the decision to perform the play first will not retard but will actually advance the action, by awakening Claudius to a sense of his guilt. The performance of a play was arranged for upon quite independent grounds; *The Murder of Gonzago* would have afforded an excellent diversion for brooding melancholy: and now Hamlet, realising his duty to his father, has decided to alter the character of the performance so as to bring it into definite relation to the business in hand: what more could be asked of him than that?

Yet what has he really done? Just what he is in the habit of doing: having pulled himself up for a moment, he has let himself go once more. Knowing that what is required is an uncongenial form of action, he has let himself go into a line of action in accord with his natural bent. But lest Conscience should point out the fact that what he has decided to do is to postpone the action for which he is responsible, Intellect, at the bidding of Desire, forestalls it by the discovery (ll. 627 sq.) of a perfectly rational excuse for the decision to follow Instinct and to write a play. What an admirable ground for postponement if one

were to doubt the ghost's veracity! Why not doubt it, then? Some centuries after Hamlet's days, investigators of occult phenomena will be aware that those who have intercourse with 'spirits' often have tricks played upon them by those beings. There is really no reason why Hamlet should not question the ghost's reliability: 'the spirit that he has seen may be the devil.' That it might be so, might be 'a goblin damned' (I. iv. 40), was the very first thought to enter his mind when first he saw the ghost: but he was quickly convinced of the ghost's identity, and not a shadow of suspicion has crossed his mind since then. So he did not say, with regard to the player—

What would he do
Had he the hypothetical motive for passion
That I have?

Nor did he afterwards say—

This is most brave,
That I, the son of a father probably murdered,
Prompted now to revenge, if I mistake not,—

No, for he was sure. It is not, then, that a suspicion leads him to the decision to write a play, but, conversely, that the decision to write a play leads him to invent the suspicion, to persuade himself (that is to say) that he suspects. The Church's tendency to attribute unexplained phenomena to the devil commends itself as affording a rational excuse for the postponement of the strenuous action

which duty requires, but which is impossible, and for the substitution therefor of an action less strenuous and more artistic, which falls within the bounds of the possible.

At his first appearance in Act II, Hamlet was reading a book : at the close of the act, he is proceeding to write a play : to read or to write suits his temper equally, and well. All is perfectly natural : given certain conditions, and the employment of physical force will suggest itself to the physical-force man, while the philosopher will philosophise, and the dramatist will find the materials for a play. Hamlet, made for the life contemplative, has recourse to philosophy and drama, but not to physical force. And now, Intellect having discovered an excuse for the writing of a play, Will has adopted that excuse : the plan to write the play was not very far from being as instinctive, or spontaneous, as was the earlier thought of contributing a few lines to *The Murder of Gonzago* ; but the adopting of the excuse for the writing of it is an act of the will.

Finally it is to be noted that here for the first time (l. 630) Hamlet refers to his 'weakness,' and his 'melancholy.' Weakness in face of manifest need of vigorous action has been all along what has rendered him powerless to act : that, however, is not what he says, but that the weakness somehow gives the devil a special advantage. Weakness, the cause, all along, of an unsatisfactory and

spontaneous postponement, is now transformed by Hamlet into a rational excuse for what he persuades himself is a satisfactory and voluntary postponement. That is why he is now able to mention to himself, for the first time, that weakness, acknowledging it without compunction. He has blamed himself for his inaction, calling himself a 'rogue' and a 'rascal': weakness is not a subject for blame but for helpless regret. To accuse oneself of being a 'rogue' may lead one to try and improve; but to accuse oneself of being 'weak' will not make one strong, unless, perhaps, feeling thus one betakes oneself to prayer, as Hamlet was disposed to do in I. v. 132; generally it will only mean, in fact, that the action cannot be accomplished. So Hamlet has avoided openly acknowledging to himself the weakness until now. But now the acknowledgment, far from being a confession that the action cannot be accomplished, is actually a help, as affording an additional reason for the other action decided upon, namely the writing of a play.

Now the force of this wonderful soliloquy has hitherto been strangely missed, the supposition that Hamlet had decided about the play upon an earlier occasion having deprived the passage of most of its meaning. But results such as the above, results obtainable only by painstaking study of such a passage, suggest some strange reflections. For if it is found to be evidently impossible for

anyone during the performance of the play to follow the course of Hamlet's thoughts, save as the result of a detailed study of the text at home beforehand,—if it is found that even the general sense of a passage such as this cannot be readily apprehended—what bearing has such a discovery upon the theory that Shakespeare is much concerned about stage effect ?¹ That he does secure this, in a general way, is sufficiently proved by the fact of stage success ; but it would sometimes appear as though it were secured incidentally, casually, the dramatist's real aim and whole concern being just to satisfy himself. Thus it must have been merely for his own satisfaction, merely, that is to say, because it suited his conception of the character that he had in hand, that he inserted a reference, in Hamlet's conversation with the actor, to the ' dozen or sixteen lines ' that he was going to write, a reference the effect of which has been to mislead everyone.²

This has, furthermore, an important bearing

¹ I have dealt with this subject in relation to other passages (see p. 58 and references thence) and have touched upon it before (p. 110) in relation to the passage before us.

² Someone will reasonably say that if my theory were sound it would long since have occurred to others. But most of those who write about Shakespeare are in too great haste. For example, hunting for the lines which they think Hamlet wrote, they are sure that he must have written either twelve or else sixteen ; as though, when suddenly struck by the thought of writing a few lines on a subject of interest, one must at the same time know exactly how many lines one's thoughts, when they take form, will occupy. Another example is that Hamlet's views on drama are constantly confused with Shakespeare's, in spite of Hamlet's admission that what he liked was unsuited for acting.

upon the subject of criticism. Everyone writes his impressions of the play ; and it certainly is most natural that that should be so. Impressionist criticism, warrantable as applied to other forms of literature, must appear to have a very special relevance to drama, seeing that, whereas we may be expected to peruse at our leisure epic or novel, the hypothesis in the case of drama is that we just see the play performed ; and although as a matter of fact we study it at home, it may well be with a sense that its proper appeal is the appeal of the stage. Nor does it cause any difficulty that independent observers, recording their impressions, should be found to have reached very different results : for truth is many-sided, and none of us sees it from all sides ; character presents to different observers aspects that differ according to the diversity of their standpoints as well as of their powers of vision. But such is the brevity of language, such is what one might call the intellectual frugality, with which Shakespeare sets down things of great import and then just leaves them,—without amplification, without emphasis, without a hint to his audience to take note—that in the greatest plays impressionist criticism is often rendered nugatory, or at least has often a tendency, even in the hands of brilliant critics, to yield results fairly remote from the truth of the play.

We have come to the end of the second act. It contains no action that advances the plot ; but

it terminates at the moment when an action has just been decided upon which really will advance the plot. It terminates, that is to say, at the point where, if the hero were a practical man and the plot therefore a more normal plot, the first act ought to terminate. If Hamlet has to say, as at the close of Act II, 'I must take steps to find out whether the King is guilty or not,' this ought to be said before and not after the time when he says, as at the close of Act I, 'It is clearly proved that things are out of joint and that it is my heavy duty to set them right.' Such is the retardation of the plot, due to the hero's inefficiency. Better, it might be said, resolve so late, rather than never, to take steps to find out whether the king is guilty; but the worst of it is that, as analysis has made clear, the doubt upon this point is a supposititious doubt invented to excuse the substitution of another sort of action for the action that is required.

So far, Fate is on Hamlet's side. Although no move in a right direction has been made by him through the whole of Act II, still there is no sign yet of any ill consequence to result from procrastination. Fate seems merciful and patient, content to wait upon the leisure of the Prince. And the action that he now has at last decided upon is indeed to advance the plot. But, alas, it will prove to be in spite of Hamlet that it is to do so: the hand that directs the avenging sword will seem to be his hand, but another hand will be controlling

his—the hand of a no longer merciful and patient Fate—making him, if he cannot slay the right man, slay the wrong instead, whereby, independent of any further volitional action of his, all will move in orderly sequence down to the catastrophe, down to his own death, when at last, at the last moment, he will accomplish the action that at the beginning was given him as his life's work to do. But we are anticipating : the climax, the turning-point, is reserved for the central act : at the end of Act II, Fate is still well disposed to Hamlet.

THE THIRD ACT

It might appear vexatious that the study of the central act should have to be preceded by a discussion as to what constitutes that act ; but such is the case : we know where the act commences, but where does it end ? ¹ In the editions that are in our hands, it closes with Sc. iv. This, however, does not mean that there is early authority, quarto or folio, for this close, nor yet that those few who have given thought to the matter consider it correct. It is adhered to because, on the one hand, it is only to a limited extent that scholarship has concerned itself with Shakespeare's plot-structure ; and because, on the other hand, a long accepted act-division has acquired a prescriptive claim, and alteration is attended by very awkward consequences. Indeed, it may be just as well that the long-established division has not been interfered with ; for the very cause that led to the acceptance, in the absence of early authority, of the close of Sc. iv, has tended to hinder unanimity in respect of any other division, the fact being that there would appear to be more than one point at which

¹ See, on the division of the acts, Appendix A.

the dramatist might have made the break. It is therefore necessary to consider one by one the substitutes which have been suggested for the usual division.

In the first place, then, some one has suggested that Act III should extend to the end of our Act IV, Sc. iv. The effect would be to get the division of acts to coincide with the break in time, for the events of our Act IV, Sc. i-iv follow immediately upon those of Act III, whereas between Act IV Sc. iv and Sc. v there is a considerable gap. We should then have the announcement of Hamlet's return from the voyage in another act than that which tells of his embarkation. But it would be easy to adduce other examples of act-division independent of breaks in time.¹ And this change would be highly unsatisfactory. It would overcrowd Act III, which ought to be concerned, as it is in our editions, with the sub-play and its immediate sequel: all that comes after the interview with the Queen and the death of Polonius belonging to a fresh chapter in the life-story of Hamlet. It would also leave too little for Act IV, and would give us one act in which the hero would not appear at all. Hamlet's soliloquies represent psychological stages reached: in Act I there are two of them; in Act II there is one; in Act III there are three—quite enough Hamlet-psychology for Act III, without

² See p. 187 *n*.

putting into it also the soliloquy which belongs to Act IV.

There is, however, only a solitary and perhaps casual suggestion that Act III should extend thus far. The division for which there is some critical authority is at the end of our Act IV, Sc. iii. Caldecott and Elze, followed by Hudson and Dowden, would divide thus. This would be a great improvement upon the accepted division. It would dispose of the Polonius affair in Act III, and would allow Act IV to open with the introduction of a new character in Fortinbras, who as a matter of fact is to succeed to the throne of Denmark.

Yet there are objections to the theory that the central act was intended to extend thus far; and it is the conviction of the present writer that it should terminate with our Act IV, Sc. ii. As Act III, Sc. iv closes, we are engaged with the problem of the mental condition of Hamlet, who is so much concerned about the lack of virtue in his mother's re-marriage, and so indifferent about his own action in slaying Polonius, whose corpse he is unconcernedly dragging out. In point of time, the next two scenes follow upon this one without any gap. In the fifth scene it is still night (l. 29); and so it is, no doubt, in the sixth scene, when the emissaries of Claudius have come to secure Hamlet and to take him to the King. 'Bring me to him,' says Hamlet, with a madman's

cunning, making them think he will go with them quietly, and then he runs away. They have not got him yet, but off they run, 'fox and hounds,' as Hamlet says. Here, according to this hypothesis, the act terminates. Nor could it close in a more appropriate manner. The act has for content the sub-play and its immediate consequences for Hamlet and for Claudius. It should lead, for Hamlet, to the strengthening of his hand for revenge; but as it does not lead to that, mental and moral collapse is the outcome instead. Nothing shows the breakdown so clearly as this fox-and-hounds incident: the last that we see of Hamlet in the third act is his running about, purposeless, insane. And for Claudius, the outcome is alarm: the last that we hear of him is that his 'soul is full of discord and dismay.'

The opening of Act IV, according to this hypothesis, is as effective as is the close of Act III. Claudius and Hamlet are making a fresh start. Claudius has recovered his self-possession and kingly dignity in the presence of his 'wisest friends,'¹ by whom he is attended, and he has made some important plans since we saw him last. The sending off of Hamlet, indeed, was planned before the acting of the sub-play,² but

¹ See our IV. i. 38.

² See III. i. 177. It is only hastened (see our IV. i. 29) by the events of the night. The plan did not comprise Hamlet's death: the object was only to get him out of the country. See p. 166 n.

the revelation of the King's malign intention to bring about his death is perfectly new. In the three previous acts, Claudius was passive ; Hamlet was expected to be active. The result was lamentable failure on Hamlet's part. And, in particular, Act III was the act in which he had his chance and missed it. It is Claudius's turn to be active now. To him belongs the fourth act. It begins, and it is to end, with plans of his for the destruction of Hamlet. For Claudius, this opening scene of Act IV is thus a fresh start. So it is for Hamlet too, for he therein sets out for England, and we feel that he is commencing to travel towards his doom. The fact that this scene contains a final reference to the corpse of Polonius is what has led some to suggest that this was intended to be the closing scene of Act III. The fact that this scene starts a fresh movement, a movement towards the catastrophe of Act V, is of far greater consequence ; and this gives it the same position in the plot as is occupied by Act IV, Sc. i in *MACBETH*, for example, or *JULIUS CÆSAR*, or *OTHELLO*, and is evidence that this was intended to be the opening scene of Act IV.¹

It has already been stated² that Shakespeare frequently makes a point of constructing his plot about a moral centre which coincides with the central scene or scenes of the third act. Now a

¹ See, further, pp. 181-3 and 186-8.

² Pp. 20-7. See also Appendix A.

careful study of the plot-structure in HAMLET will show that there is such a moral centre in Act III, Sc. iii and iv. But according to the hypothesis that has now been adduced respecting the act-division, these scenes were intended to be the central scenes of the act, as it was to comprise six scenes in all. Therefore, if that hypothesis be accepted, it will follow that HAMLET affords another example of Shakespeare's singular liking for a formal centre.

To render this point clear, it will be necessary to review the act as a whole. Scenes i and ii comprise the preparation for and the performance of the sub-play. Fate is on Hamlet's side: for not only was it by a happy chance that the players arrived at Court so opportunely, but the success of their performance proves as great as Hamlet could wish; the 'occulted guilt' of the King being speedily 'unkennelled.' Then there follow Sc. iii and iv. Although, after the performance of his play, Hamlet seemed to be moving in a wrong direction, going towards the Queen instead of towards the King, yet Fate, favourable still, and planning for him better than he could plan for himself, has brought him accidentally into the presence of the King. The room where Claudius is found is not on the direct way to the Queen's room,¹ but Fate has directed his steps. There is the murderer! There is the opportunity for revenge! But it is another

¹ Polonius told Claudius that Hamlet was going to the Queen's room; and if Claudius had expected him to pass that way, he would not have remained there to pray.

thought than that of revenge that is in Hamlet's mind as he enters, and so the opportunity finds him unprepared. He has not been thinking of slaying the King, but of preaching to the Queen. So he passes on, easily supplying himself with an excuse for the postponement of revenge.¹ Fate was Hamlet's friend, and gave him chances: Hamlet is his own enemy, and has missed them. There are limits to Fate's forbearance. Therefore, having sheathed his sword in the presence of the one whom he ought to put to death for his crimes, in a few moments he draws it to slay another man for the trifling offence of 'being too busy.' It is with the dead body lying there that he preaches his high morality. In vain does the ghost appear to 'whet' Hamlet's 'purpose'; for his only 'purpose' is to secure his mother's repentance; and when the ghost has withdrawn he resumes his discourse as though it had never appeared. 'There was a tide in the affairs of Hamlet which taken at the flood might lead to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of his life is bound in shallows and in miseries.' The tide has turned between Sc. iii and Sc. iv. The centre of the play is passed. The career of that noble figure is henceforward a downward career. The slaying of Polonius involves the doom of Hamlet. So the fifth scene tells us

¹ Nothing is easier than the criticism that there really was no good opportunity for revenge; how, for example, would Hamlet justify his action before the public, if he slew Claudius now? But see, with regard to such criticism, p. 227 n.

that Hamlet will be sent out of Denmark immediately, and the sixth scene shows him purposeless, insane. Thus Sc. iii and iv constitute the moral centre.

Having reviewed the act as a whole, we may revert to the study of its scenes severally. As the first scene opens, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who undertook the task of 'gleaning' **Sc. i.** from Hamlet the source of his gloom, and of seeking to distract him by amusements, announce that, if unsuccessful in the former part of their task, they have succeeded at any rate in the latter part; for there seemed in Hamlet 'a kind of joy' at the prospect of a play. Claudius, much relieved, feels that his suspicion respecting the true cause of Hamlet's gloom may have been groundless, and looks forward to his being cured by amusement. Gertrude, for her part, is inclined to place her confidence in love: more faithful in maternal than she once was in marital affection, she wishes that her eccentric son may marry a sensible and gay young woman: she cannot but feel that that may set things right; and the inferiority of the girl's social position counts for little, his welfare being at stake. So to Ophelia she remarks, 'I hope your virtues will bring him to his wonted way again'; 'Madam,' is the reply, 'I wish my virtue may.' The Queen then withdraws, leaving the game to the other pieces, White to checkmate Black, in how many moves? Ophelia, the White Pawn,

small and insignificant, can be very useful in helping to check the Prince 'whose sable arms, Black as his purpose, did the night resemble.' The pawn can be moved a step at a time forward or, upon occasion, obliquely, for the capture of an important piece : especially is it useful to cover the three-cornered moves by which the White Knight has made himself famous : he, the man 'of wisdom and of reach,' who 'by indirections finds directions out.'

Ophelia once had learned ever so gladly to listen to the Prince's words of love ; later, she learned ever so sadly to refuse to listen because the wise held his love to be dangerous ; and now that the Queen encourages her to renew her intercourse with Hamlet, how should she but be glad ? So, pretending to pray, and reflecting how to proceed when he will address her, she awaits his entry. The course of her little thoughts will soon be revealed, and the dramatist need not set them forth for us in the form of a soliloquy : but it is otherwise with Hamlet, the nature of whose reflections at the moment we should have no chance of guessing, if we overheard him not.

Oh that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew ;
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon against self-slaughter.

These are not the words of this soliloquy, but of the one overheard upon Hamlet's first appearance,

in Act I ; yet how slight is the difference between his thoughts then and now, and how strange that the difference should be slight, in view of all that has occurred since then. To find the explanation of this, the situation must be reviewed with care.

Hamlet's natural interest, we know, would be in forms of mental rather than of physical activity : he was of a contemplative disposition. But as he had to act in the physical sphere, just as we all have to, it might be asked what forms of physical action would be congenial to him : and the answer would be, speaking, reading, writing. When he came before us for the first time, he recognised with sorrow that speaking was out of the question : ' break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue ' : opportunity for much speech was to come, but not yet. As for reading, it was soon to be resorted to,¹ and it would tend to relieve from dreadful thoughts, though these might indeed break in and spoil its pleasures. As for writing, there was no occasion for writing : there was to be occasion, shortly. The form of physical action to which Hamlet's mind turned was suicide. Thought, for which, as we have said, he was better suited than for anything else, had become intolerable, because in the existing moral environment human nature was so distressing to think upon. Physical activity in some forms would be a relief from thought. But

¹ II. ii. 167.

speaking and writing, being the forms which have closest relation to thought, are not appropriate forms to resort to with that end in view. What then? Suicide. The suggestion of suicide was repudiated on the ground of the sinfulness of such an act; that, at least, was the ostensible ground, for it must be admitted that Hamlet did not always correctly analyse his own motives. Soon enough, responsibility was laid upon him for the performance of an action strenuous in character and more practical than had occurred to him, namely the avenging of his father's death. Hamlet's mind, therefore, did not revert to suicide, his thoughts thenceforward to the end of Act II having relation, near or remote, to the subject of the murder. By the end of that act, he had resolved upon writing a play, as a congenial form of action that might have some bearing upon uncongenial revenge, and had resolved to doubt the guilt of Claudius. And here Act III opens. Now, if Claudius be not known to be guilty, then Hamlet's position is, clearly, the position which he occupied in Act I, Sc. ii; all that has occurred since then counting for nothing. His hypothesis—a false one—is that he is not sure of the genuineness of the ghost's communication: his belief in it is (hypothetically) suspended until after the stage performance to-night. Therefore he can let himself go, and his mind reverts to the position which it occupied before the ghost's

communication was made, so that suicide is contemplated afresh, described now as an 'enterprise of great pitch and moment,' an 'action' which requires for its accomplishment more 'resolution' than Hamlet possesses. There is another 'action, required of Hamlet, for which also 'resolution' is needed; but of that he is not thinking now, the plan for to-night's performance having supplied an excuse for postponing the thought of that.

Now suicide has a unique peculiarity, in that, while being a violent form of physical action, it is at the same time, and beyond doubt, the cessation and negation of all such action. Hamlet, shunning it still, thinks now of other than religious objections to the deed: for whereas it was as a relief from thought that he was desiring to die, further reflection has led him to question whether death would have the desired result, whether, so evidently involving the cessation of all physical action, it does in like manner provide an ending to thought. Brother of sleep, may it not have its rest disturbed by dreams? How can Hamlet be sure? If there were ghosts revisiting the glimpses of the moon to tell what is beyond death—but there are no ghosts: the devil may be potent in abusing mortals by goblins damned, but—so wonderfully has the false hypothesis developed—there has been no reappearance of the deceased King of Denmark,

and beyond the grave is 'the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns.'

Coming, during the course of these reflections, upon Ophelia, engaged apparently in prayer, Hamlet's first impulse is to ask her to pray for him. Then, conversation commencing, we learn the nature of the thoughts which occupied Ophelia's mind as she was waiting. She had responded to the Queen's expression of hope that her 'virtue' might now be of some avail for Lord Hamlet's cure. It was always 'virtue' that they had spoken of in connection with her relations with him: when Laertes, for instance, had told her to avoid all intercourse with him, she had recognised that her good brother was pointing out 'the way to heaven.' Since then, at her father's bidding, she had virtuously repelled Lord Hamlet's letters and denied his access to her. But there was one thing that she had not done; and as, pretending to say her prayers, she reflected upon virtue, the neglect weighed upon her conscience. She had kept cherished 'remembrances' of the sweetest episode she had known, though 'long' feeling that she ought to 're-deliver' these 'rich gifts.' Now is the time—the Queen has told her so—for her to be virtuous; and she will be so virtuous as to sacrifice these. Then what else can she virtuously do? She can tell Lord Hamlet that she has a 'noble mind.' She can reprimand him for having jilted her. Not, to be sure, that he really did anything of the sort; but the accusa-

tion may lead to his saying something that will help her wise father and the King to judge of the state of his mind by the encounter.

When Ophelia thus assumes the part of the virtuous person who has been badly treated, Hamlet laughs in bitter mockery; 'Ha, ha!' Then he proceeds to insult her, grossly; and his cruelty has been deemed inexcusable—there may be only this to urge in mitigation, that she understands nothing of what he is saying—but it has also been held to be incomprehensible, and it should not be so. Hamlet was well aware of the ground upon which he was excluded from the company of Ophelia; in his interview with Polonius he told him mockingly that he was aware of it. And it is evident that he is now using to Ophelia language very similar to that used by her father and brother: 'I would not,' says Hamlet, 'have you so slander any moment leisure as to give words or talk with the Lord Hamlet'; 'do not believe his vows'; and 'keep you out of the shot and danger of desire.'¹ Now what could be the reason for his speaking to her thus, but that he believes that Ophelia, having taken to heart the advice so freely tendered by her relatives, has suspected him, even as her father and brother have suspected him, of evil designs? To this suspicion he attributes, perhaps her fright upon the occasion of their last interview, and certainly her general attitude. It is Hamlet's

¹ cf. I. iii. 35, 127, 133-4.

practice, when he has divined the thoughts in the mind of another, to put those thoughts into words in conversing with that other, as though the thoughts were his own. He acted thus when speaking to Polonius about Ophelia: in like manner, knowing now that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern attribute his gloom to disappointed ambition, he is going to tell them, the next time he sees them, that that is indeed its cause. So, too, upon this occasion divining as he thinks Ophelia's state of mind, he tells her that she must not trust him, that she should not admit discourse to her beauty, that his love was not true. Now in the case of Polonius, in the case of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet was right in his surmises; was he right, then, in the case of Ophelia also? Did she suspect her lover so? We are not meant to anticipate what we may learn later about her state of mind: not only have we no reason to judge, from the scene before us, that Hamlet is right in his surmise; but her inability to understand what he is saying gives us ground for judging the contrary. But in the scornful words of Hamlet it is easy to trace the bitterness with which he naturally resents the imputation of foul motives in his love affair. Scrupulous almost to excess, as we have seen,¹ respecting the relations of the sexes, to him has been attributed the intention of harming Ophelia.

¹ See pp. 53-6.

So his invective carries him far: 'if thou dost marry,' he says, 'I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry'—the plague of being suspected. 'Honest' enough himself in this particular, he 'did not escape calumny'; let her be 'pure as snow,' and yet be calumniated too.

It only remains to be noticed that when defending himself against the imputation of dishonourable motives — 'I am myself indifferent honest'— he had to add that he could accuse himself of many other sins. For this is profoundly characteristic of Hamlet. It is the position proper to the Christian man, more particularly in certain moods whose tendency may be to decline to the morbid: while defending himself against a wrongful accusation he cannot but feel that there are many 'offences' of which, if all were revealed, he might be rightfully indicted. Yet how little Hamlet knows himself! That able as he is to understand others he cannot understand himself; that capable as he is of analysing motives he cannot analyse his own motives—this has been made manifest before,¹ and here is further evidence of it. As the self-accusation here is casual, and not the result of reflection, it may be natural that the list of offences should be defective; but the selection is a strange one: 'I am proud,' he says, 'revengeful, ambitious.' Proud? never was there a Crown Prince

¹ See pp. 112 *sq.* For a later example see p. 196.

more devoid of pride. Revengeful? why, revenge was what was wanted, and it could not be had of him. Ambitious? never was there a man deprived of a kingdom who gave so little thought to his loss.

Finally Hamlet goes out, his parting thrust being a scornful reference to the attempts the poor child had made to render herself more attractive. For the second time he speaks of the mode by which she beautified herself—‘ a vile phrase, “ beautified ” is a vile phrase ’¹—with the help of cosmetics. ‘ You attitudinize,’ he adds, ‘ you walk with mincing steps, you lisp ’; but many maidens there are who instinctively adopt just those airs and affectations by way of rendering themselves attractive to wooers of much less note than princes of the blood royal; and it was not surprising if being made love to by the Lord Hamlet led Ophelia to show, by added graces of demeanour, her desire to grow worthier of that love. To Hamlet, however, all that was artificial, all that savoured of insincerity, was only abhorrent. And even as his mother’s shortcomings led him to cry ‘ Frailty, thy name is woman ! ’² so Ophelia’s shortcomings (according to his estimate) led him to include the whole sex in his condemnation once again. These are the women whom he has known, and these have failed, so womanhood is a failure. That is why in addressing Ophelia he seems

¹ II. ii. 111.

² I. ii. 146.

to be addressing women in general : what she does, no doubt they all would do.

So he has gone out :

And she, of ladies most deject and wretched,
That sucked the honey of his music vows,
Now sees that noble and most sovereign reason,
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh.

For the ' overthrow ' of Lord Hamlet, now ' quite, quite down,' his ' form and feature ' ' blasted with madness,' Ophelia pitifully laments ; and with her, in her lamentation for the one whom she loved with all her might, all onlookers and hearers sympathise : or all but one. For one there is whose sardonic laughter breaks in strangely upon the pathos of the scene ; or at least it would be so if our ears were not dull of hearing ; for Shakespeare is mocking at Ophelia ; but his audience has not heard the mockery, and has taken in good faith, as though they expressed the truth regarding Hamlet, the words that Shakespeare in his irony has put into her lips. Her lover was first of all a courtier, and had the ' courtier's eye,' she said. Let the eye of courtier Rosencrantz follow the movements of Claudius as the eyes of an handmaid are upon her mistress ; let the eye of courtier Osric ogle or flatter ; but the eye of Hamlet ? Her lover was, secondly, a soldier, for he had, she said, the ' soldier's sword.' The Crown Prince may from infancy be honorary colonel of one of the first regiments in Denmark ; but Hamlet a

real soldier? Her lover was, thirdly, a scholar, for he had, she said, the tongue of a well-educated man: his scholarship might account for the puzzling language of his love-making.¹ Moreover her lover was the 'rose of the fair state': for if to Hamlet Denmark was foul, 'an unweeded garden, things rank and gross in nature possessing it merely,'² to Ophelia it was 'fair,' a garden of roses, the Prince himself being its brightest flower. And he was 'the state's expectancy,' the heir apparent. Now a princess is always a model of beauty, and a Crown Prince is always a person of magnificent physique, of military bearing, 'the observed of all observers' at the Court, and the leader—it stands to reason—

¹ The line, it would at first appear, ought to read either

'The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, sword, tongue,'

or else

'The courtier's, scholar's, soldier's, eye, tongue, sword,'

for 'eye' goes with 'courtier,' 'sword' with 'soldier,' and 'tongue' with 'scholar.' Shakespeare's poetic judgment rejects 'eye, sword, tongue,' in favour of 'eye, tongue, sword,' on two euphonic grounds, one of which is that the terminal *d* and initial *t* sound badly in juxtaposition. The order in the latter part of the line being thus decided, why then did he not write for the former part of it 'courtier's, scholar's, soldier's'? There was no euphonic ground for rejecting this the natural and proper order. The reason for the change is that to Ophelia as she 'sucked the honey of his music vows' her great lover has appeared to be perfect: and in all generations the fashionable lover, to be perfect, must be courtier and soldier first; a good education may render him an object of increased wonder and admiration, but it is of paramount importance that he be a military man. Shakespeare, having for the moment put himself into the position of Ophelia, is obliged to arrange the words in the order which the things occupy in her mind.

² I. ii. 135-7.

of Society. So Hamlet, she went on to say, set the fashions in gentlemen's clothes and manners: he was 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form.' Hamlet a leader of fashion!

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
Are of imagination all compact:¹

the male lover—frantic as the madman, according to Duke Theseus—'sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt'; and the female lover sees in the Lord Hamlet all that 'the state's expectancy' should be. Ophelia, loving Hamlet, sees in him the ideal prince—a courtier, a soldier, a leader of society. But this conventional and proper heir-apparent, existing only in her imagination, bears no resemblance to Hamlet, whom we know so much better than she knows him: it is for this reason that there appears to Shakespeare to be a humorous element in the pathos of Ophelia's lamentation, so that the mocker laughs amidst the sorrow with the laughter of dramatic irony.²

There may be more reasons than one for the difference between Shakespeare's Ophelia and the Ophelia of our fancy. Sensible of unlimited pathos in her situation, readers may have chivalrously drawn, for their conception of the character, upon the well-spring of their sensibility rather than upon the creative words of the dramatist; or it may be that they are influenced by stage presentments of

¹ *MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*, V. i. 8-11.

² For a similar phenomenon later see pp. 238-42.

the character. But nothing save lack of leisure to meditate upon Shakespeare's words, lack of study, could explain such a phenomenon as the universal acceptance (on the part of critics) of Ophelia's description of Hamlet, which is intended only to reveal the real Ophelia, as though it described the real Hamlet.¹ Shakespeare is prepared to tell us more than we have been prepared to hear; for whereas it seems natural to rely upon an impressionist criticism in respect of characters in drama, Shakespeare is full of matter that impressionism will never get a glimpse of.

This scene closes by showing us that Claudius is convinced that his original suspicions were justified: his pleasure at the thought of Hamlet's willingness to be amused by a play has departed, and miserable misgivings have returned. Hamlet must be sent out of Denmark.²

¹ See further, pp. 185-6, 238-42.

² I believe that, in Shakespeare's thought, Hamlet, when he appeared to go out, cunningly loitered within earshot. This could be effectively presented by an actor. There is no other way to explain Hamlet's knowledge, in III. iv. 199, than by supposing him to have overheard III. i. 177. Nor does the play contain any other inconsistency of such a character.

The reference, here, to tribute due by England to Denmark would suggest antiquity; for it would be difficult to imagine this state of affairs at a modern date. It may be freely conceded that there was carelessness, upon the dramatist's part, in permitting this solitary archaic feature to stand. It is a mere trifle; but worth noting because it has had the ludicrous result of making some writers suppose the time of the action to be about the reign of Cnut! As though this story of the Renaissance were a primitive story instead, like the story in *Saxo Grammaticus*, or like KING LEAR.

The opening of the next scene supplies one of the many illustrations to be found in the course of this tragedy, of Shakespeare's indifference to stage effect.¹ In other plays of Shakespeare **Sc. ii.** also, there are some signs of such indifference ; but in no other is it so manifest, so pronounced, as in **HAMLET**. It might almost be said that in this play Shakespeare is content to have stage effect produced, provided only that it involves for him no deviation from the main lines of his purpose ; so that it is only if it comes by chance that it is welcome, his one design, his sole concern, being the perfect presentation of character, for the satisfaction not of the theatre but of himself. And as no other dramatist ever attempted anything so difficult as the character of Hamlet, Shakespeare may be excused from attending much to stage effect ; especially as in the end the play has proved, interpreted in varied ways and with varied degree of competence or incompetence, varied measures of apprehension or misapprehension, the most popular of all the tragedies, its many puzzles notwithstanding, and its many passages of no histrionic value. But no play teaches so clearly as **HAMLET** the need for distinguishing between histrionic value and the Shakespearean conception of dramatic value. It is to suit the character of Hamlet that the lecture addressed to the actors is here introduced.

¹ Earlier illustrations have already been commented upon ; see p. 58 and references thence.

We should be strangely perverse were we to suppose the dramatist to have turned aside from his dramatic purpose for the sake of an opportunity that has occurred for conveying to us through Hamlet's lips his own views upon elocution! Shakespeare has no desire whatever to instruct us unless it be in the lineaments of Hamlet's mind and character.

As the play-scene opens, then, we find Hamlet well employed at the thoroughly congenial task of lecturing upon art. Many a playwright has felt just as Hamlet feels: the play, many a one must have said to himself, may prove an artistic success, if only it is not spoiled by bad acting! Hamlet's directions may well originate in solicitude respecting the speech of Lucianus as the most dramatic and the most important passage in his play, the only passage, in fact, about which he could speak of 'a passion'; but he is concerned, also, for the effective presentation of the whole of the play:¹ and at one point his interest in the general subject of the art causes him, forgetting the particular matter in hand, to give instructions about parts played by clowns, although there are no such in the piece to be performed; so that the instructions extend to the whole of the actor's art; and, for that matter, they embrace the dramatist's art as well. Passion, he says first, must be shown restrainedly: the part of Herod

¹ See, on Hamlet's authorship of it, pp. 108-11, 117-23, and Appendix C.

in the old mystery plays may be popular among the vulgar, but the rant that makes it popular makes it inartistic. The aim of drama, he proceeds, is not directly to convey moral teaching, but 'to hold the mirror up to nature,' to represent virtue or vice, to exhibit the state of society and the characteristics of the age. Hamlet the humanist, the interested observer of life, the enthusiastic student of the art that represents it, has now, disheartened with life, turned, for refuge from life, to art. He is himself an artist now: he has written a little play. He is also a critic of art; if it is impossible to reform life as it is lived, it may yet be possible to reform the art that represents it. And of the others in Shakespeare's day who wrote upon the theory of art or the principles of the drama, there was none who wrote as well as Hamlet could have written: for he knew all about abstract principles. The first part of his instructions to the players is of fundamental importance in relation not only to drama but to art generally. Passion, he told them, must be in their art, and with the passion restraint. It is of the essence of art that 'the torrent, the tempest, the whirlwind of passion' should be represented with a 'smoothness.' The perfect fusion of tempestuous emotion and restraining 'discretion' makes perfect art.¹ And blest are artists 'whose

¹ See, on this subject, and that of the following paragraph, pp. 31-7.

blood and judgment are so well commingled' (l. 70).

Had Hamlet, instead of delivering this matter in lecture form, set it down in the course of an essay in criticism, he would have gone on to point out the correspondence of art with life, which makes the ground of the importance of the balance between passion and restraint in art to be the importance of the same balance in life, principles in the one sphere corresponding with principles in the other. For he passes at once from his instructions to the actors, to say to Horatio, that in life the most desirable of all is to have this same balance between, or commingling of, 'blood and judgment.' What is art without passion? What is art if passion be unrestrained? What is life without passion? What is life if passion be unrestrained? The balance or commingling makes perfect art, perfect life.

Hamlet, they may say, is mad: for, to define true madness, what is it but to have a mind unbalanced? Hamlet's friend Horatio is sane; for, to define true sanity, what is it but to have passion perfectly balanced with discretion? The philosophy of Polonius may come short, and the definition of madness may fail him: but Hamlet's philosophy will suffice; for he knows sanity to consist in self-mastery, and insanity in the lack of it. So 'give me the man,' says he, 'that is not passion's slave.' The oft-repeated question whether Hamlet

was mad widens out in the light of these definitions into the question whether you are mad and I. If sanity consists in the complete development of the emotional and the rational side by side, who is the sane man? Hamlet's answer is, Horatio. There is an element of madness in the composition of many of the heroes of tragedy; and the most sublime of all such personages is Lear when of them all the most mad. But it is a very great advantage to have nothing in one that could make one's life and death a tragedy; and Horatio has this great advantage. His sanity is the ground of Hamlet's selection of him as confidant. Half mad himself, how could Hamlet do better than have such a sober friend to lean upon? Unfit to stand alone, he would take Love's arm and lean upon it; but if Love has failed him, he will lean upon the arm of Friendship. So the language which he addresses to Horatio is effusive enough.¹ He lets himself go completely. His tendency to let himself go is very different, he feels, from Horatio's self-possession; and his effusiveness stands in marked contrast to the taciturnity of his friend. To him he confides his hatred of insincerity, his contempt for the 'absurdity' of 'pomp,' his loathing of courtly 'fawning' and flattery. To him he has already confided the secret of the ghost's allegations, and now he counts upon Horatio's co-operation in the testing of Claudius's guilt.²

¹ See *ante*, pp. 100-1.

² 'A principal fruit of friendship is the ease and discharge

Was Horatio really just what Hamlet believed him to be? It is perhaps as yet too soon to ask ourselves that question; for since the ghost-scenes in Act I he has not again appeared until now. He may have something of the self-possession of the 'antique Romans,'¹ in memory of whom he was christened by that Roman-sounding name. So taciturn at any rate is he that the solitary observation which he contributes to the discourse upon his character comprises but the words, 'Oh, my dear lord!' He does not wear his heart upon his sleeve; and he may prove able to keep a secret well.² But it will be easier later on than now to form an estimate of this man's character.³

of the fulness and swellings of the heart. . . . Princes, in regard of the distance of their fortune from that of their subjects and servants, cannot gather this fruit, except . . . they raise some persons to be as it were companions. . . . The Roman name attaineth the true use and cause thereof, naming them *participes curarum*. . . . Duke Charles the Hardy . . . would communicate his secrets with none, and least of all those secrets which troubled him most. Wherefore . . . towards his latter time that closeness did impair and a little perish his understanding. . . . A man were better relate himself to a statua or picture, than to suffer his thoughts to pass in smother.' (Bacon, *Of Friendship*.)

¹ V. ii. 352.

² 'Secrecy is indeed the virtue of a confessor. . . . If a man be thought secret, it inviteth discovery. . . . And as in confession the revealing is not for worldly use but for the ease of a man's heart, so secret men come to the knowledge of many things of that kind; while men rather discharge their minds that impart their minds.' (Bacon, *Of Simulation and Dissimulation*.)

³ See *post*, pp. 235-7.

The King with his Court comes in to see the play; and as he inquires after Hamlet's welfare, Hamlet, aware that he is puzzled about him, amuses himself by replying, 'I have to live upon airy promises'; as though he said, 'The reason why I am so gloomy is that you deprive me of my crown, putting me off with the promise of succeeding you in its possession, insubstantial food for my ambitious soul.' That Claudius fails to catch his meaning does not matter to him a whit. As they then take their seats, Hamlet placing himself close to Ophelia, we again observe the tendency observable in his previous interview with her; disillusioned now, he is disposed to profanity, obscenity, in the presence of the one through whom the illusion and the disillusion came.

So the play commences. The dialogue of the player king and queen, opening in the language of pseudo-poetry with its Phœbus, Neptune, Tellus, Hymen, and its allusions to the earth's rotundity and the moon's shining with reflected light, with such language lightly veils the simple fact of the thirty years' unbroken bliss of the married life of King Hamlet and Queen Gertrude.¹ But in the succeeding argument we see that the author's pre-occupation with his own situation curiously affected his treatment of that of his mother. Willing, says

¹ I have referred further in Appendix C to the style of the sub-play, comparing or contrasting it with that of the player's speech in Act II, Sc. ii.

the player-king, is closely connected with feeling ; ' purpose ' originates in and depends upon the ' violence ' of ' passion.' Purpose is thus ' the slave to memory.' The point is that the recalling of the loved one is necessary in order to waken the ' passion ' which will result in ' purpose ' ; this recalling is the work of ' memory ' ; and as the time of the loved one's presence recedes into the past, the image which memory is able to produce becomes normally fainter. The remark is applicable, of course, to Gertrude ;¹ but to us it must be evident that it is at least as applicable to Hamlet, who will describe himself as ' lapsed in time and passion.'² When the argument proceeds to say that purpose, which ' unripe ' should not be translated into action, may just drop if let hang too long in order to render it ' mellow,' the application of this to Hamlet is obvious enough, but that it has any application to Gertrude or the player-queen, to whom the context attempts to apply it, is not clear. And then when the argument states that it is often ' most necessary ' not to act as in a moment of emotion one felt impelled to act ; or when, after some general moralising not relevant to the matter in hand, the argument goes on to state that what we are ' fated ' to accomplish is different from what we ' devised ' (l. 222), so that ' our deep plots pall,'³ in either case

¹ Cf. Hamlet's remarks about her, ll. 132-5.

² III. iv. 107.

³ V. ii. 9.

the application to Hamlet is at least as clear as that to Gertrude.¹

‘When I am dead, my dearest,’ said the player-king Hamlet, ‘you will find another mate.’ ‘Never,’ said the player-queen Gertrude: ‘none wed the second but who killed the first’ (l. 190). The perfectly clear aim of the playwright was to ‘catch the conscience’ of his mother with regard to her treatment of his father. Her sin was that of adultery, whereby she ‘killed’ him, in the sense that a subsidiary reason for the murder was that Claudius wanted his brother’s wife, whom he had already ‘won.’² That Hamlet made no other reference than this to his mother’s chief sin, a more definite and clearer reference to which would be more likely to catch her conscience, must at first seem strange. It will scarcely do to say that his mind revolted from the suggestion of her shame, for in the dialogue in the next scene he was to go into much revolting detail: it must rather be that even as in his first soliloquy³ he felt reference to incest almost unnecessary, on the ground that re-marrying was offence enough, so here on precisely the same ground he felt mention either of adultery or of incest to be unnecessary. The purpose of the dialogue in the sub-play is to bring out the heinousness of a second marriage. He made his sole

¹ Some of this argument reappears in the discourse of Claudius to Laertes, IV, vii; which see, and the comments thereon, pp. 211 *sq.*

² I, v. 45.

³ I, ii.

reference to adultery in terms which his mother would not be able to understand.¹ and then he passed quickly away from it, to touch upon a point that really might bring home to her her responsibility in relation to her husband's death. The player-queen says that if she re-married she might be said to 'kill' her 'dead husband,' to cause him to die again—such would be the insult to his memory. But this is 'killing' in quite a different sense from that of the former mention of it. A second marriage, according to Hamlet and his player-queen, can never be a love-marriage; and it is unfaithfulness to the first husband. No wonder that the real Gertrude remarks that 'the lady doth protest too

¹ It will be found that in the interview of Sc. iv he introduces just the same casual reference to 'killing a king,' and then passes on to his main subject without developing that reference. It might be suggested that the reason for this was that he was not sure whether there was not complicity on his mother's part in the murder. But if so, why had the ghost no knowledge or suspicion of her complicity? And why, on Hamlet's part, no further and no fuller reference, in dialogue or soliloquy? That he had no such suspicion must (I think) be clear.

Yet for Hamlet to harbour such a doubt would be much less strange than for readers to think—and they do think—that Shakespeare left undetermined that very question of Gertrude's guilt. There never was a play that set forth more fully the thoughts and feelings of the characters: and Gertrude, we are asked to believe, may have been guilty of complicity in the murder, and yet, while other deeds burden her conscience, this does not. That she knew nothing about it ought to be perfectly clear to everyone. What is there that Shakespeare could have done to make it clearer? No doubt he might have added a note stating that Gertrude is not the same person as Clytemnestra had he known that a writer in a leading Review of 1912 would express the belief that what was really required of Hamlet was that he should slay his mother!

much'; for who but Hamlet ever held quite such strong views respecting the re-marriage of a widow? ¹

Meanwhile Claudius is getting suspicious; and after suggesting to the Queen that this 'argument' seems intended to 'offend' her ² he asks for the name of the play. 'THE MOUSETRAP,' Hamlet replies, incautiously adding in mockery that it is 'metaphorically' a trap, made to catch King Claudius. He has also forgotten himself so far as to say that 'they do but poison in jest,' as though the poisoning scene were being represented; the mistake being due to its being indeed the poisoning-scene, although not yet reached in the performance, that is before his own mind in relation to Claudius. But now, realising that by allowing suspicion to be awakened before that scene is reached half the effect of his

¹ Yet it has been universally believed that Shakespeare intended the sub-play to be treated by us as a translation from the Italian, and not as the original work of Hamlet, the only man who could have written thus upon the subject. See further, Appendix C.

² It was very risky to open the performance with dumb-show; for had Claudius been startled by it, the effect might have been quite spoiled. I suggest that the only reason for having it was that it was an archaic practice affected, among the Elizabethans, by the academic school that admired Seneca, and therefore (see *ante*, pp. 103-4) resorted to by Hamlet, who, however, objected (III. ii. 14) to the *symbolic* dumbshow which was in common use and preferred one which literally prefigured the action. Claudius cannot have been looking on at the dumbshow; for he remained unsuspicious of any 'offence' save that relating to the marriage. Halliwell suggests that he was engaged in conversation with Gertrude. They may have been occupied with Hamlet's attitude towards Ophelia.

play may be lost, he seeks to withdraw his words, and to lull the suspicion of Claudius for the moment. He therefore pretends that it represents a foreign scene, and that the player-king is not a king but a 'duke' Gonzago—thus changing the name of his MOUSETRAP to that of a play that was before his mind on the previous day. So, too, when the next player comes in, he is careful to say, 'This is Lucianus, the nephew,' for fear the king should think this is Claudius, the brother,—though indeed he does accidentally say nephew of the 'king,' whereas he should say 'duke.' So we get to 'the talk of the poisoning'—the crucial point. Hamlet insists that it is but for the sake of an 'estate,' and not of a kingdom,—that the thing is a translation from the Italian : but as the King is rising 'frighted,' he need no longer try to lull suspicion, he need no longer emphasise pretended differences between the case of Claudius and the case of Lucianus ; so in mockery he now presses the point home—' You shall see anon,' he cries, ' how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.'

The performance was now at an end, and the Court had withdrawn. The delight of Hamlet was great : his performance was an unqualified success. Just at the right psychological moment Claudius had arisen alarmed. It was an artistic triumph. Would not this sort of thing, Hamlet exultantly inquired, qualify him for a place among the playwrights of the day ?

But Hamlet was now pretty mad.¹ Nor could it but be so, seeing that upon the relief of the severe nerve-tension there must follow reaction; and as in similar circumstances in Act I reaction was marked by 'wild and whirling words,' an 'antic disposition,' insane frivolity, precisely so was it on the present occasion. No man living could be of service to Hamlet in such a condition. Horatio, his newly-chosen confidant, certain now that his sovereign obtained the crown by treachery and fratricide, had no course of action to suggest, and could do nothing better than join in Hamlet's jesting.² When Rosencrantz and Guildenstern came in, Hamlet befooled them by attributing his 'distemper' to frustrated ambition, because he knew that to be what they attributed it to. But what he went on to say to them might with truth be described as addressed not to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern alone but to us all. 'You would play upon me,' said he, 'you would seem to know my stops; you would pluck out the heart

¹ A distinguished critic proves that Hamlet's 'madness' is feigned, by saying that there is not a sign of it when he is alone with Horatio. I accept the criterion, and reply that the most striking of all the examples of Hamlet's 'antic disposition' is this one, and that he is alone with Horatio.

² Yet *why* did Horatio jest? We know why Hamlet did so, but why Horatio? Having just discovered that his sovereign was a traitor and a murderer, why did he take it so lightly? And before the performance, when, having been entrusted with Hamlet's secret, he was enjoined to observe Claudius intently, did not his answer (ll. 93-4) savour of jesting? Is the explanation to be found in his looking upon his friend the Prince as very mad?

of my mystery. Do you think I am easier to be played on than a pipe? ' There is our challenge ! Are we commentators too without ' skill to command ' this instrument ' to an utterance of harmony ? '

But what is to be the next move ? Capable though Hamlet showed himself in the planning of a play, he naturally enough had made no plans for any action further than its performance ; and now that it is over he is drifting rudderless. Nor could aught else have been reasonably expected. For whereas it may on the one hand be said that now the way of revenge is cleared for him, the guilt of Claudius being no longer open to doubt, it must on the other hand be pointed out that it is not for the first time that these circumstances now occur. The situation is just the same as that between the time of the ghost's disclosures and the time when doubt opportunely suggested itself in connection with the chance of writing a play. During that interval there was no question as to the guilt of Claudius ; yet Hamlet was without plans then : and so under the like circumstances he is without plans again now. During the performance of the play, the sense that, from the artistic standpoint, the revelation of the guilt of Claudius should be followed by revenge had come before his artistic mind ; so that at the right moment he came out with the parody of a line of poetry about ' revenge ' : ' the croaking raven doth bellow for revenge.' It

was because he was viewing the situation from the artistic standpoint that he quoted poetry on the subject. There probably was not just then, and there certainly is not just now, any clear thought in his mind of avenging himself upon Claudius. If now asked what he thought of doing next, Hamlet might reasonably reply, 'Why, that depends upon circumstances; human actions, to be rational, must not be independent of circumstances.' The circumstance that occurs to decide his course of action this time is that his mother has sent for him. So to her he will go. If it were Claudius that had sent for him it might be a different matter; but he cannot but welcome the opportunity of speaking very straight to his mother. 'Break, my heart,' he once said, 'for I must hold my tongue': but his heart need not break, for he will have a chance of letting his tongue 'wag' freely.

But before he goes there is revealed to us through his short soliloquy what is as startling and ominous as it is new and strange. We discover a feeling on Hamlet's part of an impulse that he fears may become uncontrollable, a madman's impulse to kill. The suicidal has become a homicidal tendency. To kill Claudius is desirable, and would befit the occasion; but although he feels he could do some bloody and unnatural act, such as 'drinking hot blood'—an act obviously purposeless and futile—no thought of killing Claudius enters his mind. But he feels that in this murderous mood

he cannot trust himself: the life of his mother is not safe: he has to come to a fixed resolve not to behave like 'Nero' and stab her with a 'dagger'—has to enter into a covenant with his 'heart' and 'soul' not to murder his mother!

Now if at this point, anticipating for a moment what is presently to follow, we consider the opening of Hamlet's interview with his mother, we shall there find what must at times have caused intelligent readers some surprise. Why is Gertrude so alarmed? Why, when Hamlet has done nothing worse than to insist upon her sitting still, does she think that she is going to be murdered? The explanation is to be found in the soliloquy that has been before us. We are expected to have observed that Hamlet has been feeling an impulse within him to kill: we are expected to know that when there is danger from such a source the person in danger may be made aware of it by the instinct that Nature gives to animals for their protection; so that without any threats on Hamlet's part Gertrude is rendered sensible of the danger which indeed exists, though it is not she but another whose immediate death is to slake the thirst for blood.¹ But this dramatist's demands are most exorbitant. None

¹ Let anyone who questions this explanation just ask himself why Gertrude is no longer in terror for her own safety after Hamlet has slain a man in her presence. My own hypothesis affords a plain answer; namely that her terror, being instinctive, being due to the actual presence of danger, passes away when the danger is past; but if my hypothesis be rejected, Gertrude ought to cry 'Murder!' and 'Help!' much more vehemently after the homicide than before it.

possesses such a degree of keenness as he requires of us ; and if only he cared to help us it would be so easy to have made Gertrude say in terror,

[*Aside*] A murderous gleam, behold, illumines his eye !

or some such words as those. Thereby what we may designate dramatic effect, by which we mean little more than stage effect, would be heightened : we should then clearly apprehend that Gertrude has, just before the sudden slaying of Polonius, a sense of the near presence of danger. For Shakespeare, however, dramatic effect—which for him is something apart from stage effect—is already there definitely enough ; he declines to make things easy for us to follow, does not mind putting us to a good deal of trouble to find out what he is about. But the case before us affords another striking example of the way in which detailed study reveals the marvels of Shakespeare's psychology. His imaginative sympathy enables him, when writing in the person of Queen Gertrude, to truly impersonate the character, so as to see the situation precisely as she should see it. The result he sets down without emphasis, without iteration or insistence, indifferent as he is to our applause or our bewilderment. But in view of such psychological accuracy, discoverable, to patient and reverent perusal, in scene after scene, in detail upon detail, does not the theory that the play, though great, is full of inconsistencies, appear ridiculous in the extreme ? In view of psychological accuracy that is unrivalled,

unapproachable, might we not as critics rise higher if we were to stoop lower, acknowledging that when we fail to understand this or that it is probably due either to lack of time for reflection or to lack of insight and penetration ?

We have yet to advert to the intervening scene, in the course of which Hamlet, on his way to the Queen, is to find himself by accident alone **Sc. iii.** with the King. As this scene opens we hear of the King's decision to send Hamlet abroad.¹ Guildenstern assures him he is now engaged upon what may be described as a religious duty ; seeing that the safety of the people is bound up with that of the King.² Rosencrantz seizes upon

¹ That is all. The plan cannot include the death of Hamlet, as there is only one great crime burdening Claudius's conscience ; it would be perfectly impossible that he should intend Hamlet's destruction and yet be untroubled by any thought of such intention when reflecting upon his guilt. The foul play instinctively anticipated by Hamlet at the close of Sc. iv has not yet been determined upon. I am aware that commentators have held otherwise ; but I submit that their psychological insight has been seriously at fault this time.

² Mr. Bradley calls attention (*Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 137 n.) to the 'puzzling' fact that the courtiers treat the sub-play, not as an allegation that the King is a murderer, but as a threat to murder him. Any solution of such a difficulty must be merely speculative, perhaps ; but I offer the following. The play bored Rosencrantz and Guildenstern : they had observed the dumbshow, but paid no attention to the monotonous dialogue, until they heard the King say 'Is there no offence in't ?' This woke them up and caused them to reflect that the dumbshow suggested a topical intention in Lord Hamlet's play. The player king and queen would represent their own King and Queen—that there ever was another king the courtier mind forgets ('for oh, for oh, the hobby-horse is forgot') : then the man who in the dumbshow kissed the crown would represent Lord Hamlet, who, as they knew, was longing for the crown

his brother's brilliant thought and appropriates it, decorating it in the disguises of three such elaborate metaphors that he too may be looked upon as a truly accomplished courtier. And as soon as these have gone out Claudius tells himself that upon him rests the curse of Cain. In public he has 'always been dignified; he has kept up appearances well. Only once before have we been allowed a peep behind the play-scenes of his life, and seen in his tiring-room behind the stage, stripped of his 'shreds and patches' (III. iv. 102), the miserable player's naked soul. That peep just gave us to know that, sensible of the 'ugliness' of a criminal 'deed,' the King when in solitude cried out, 'Oh heavy burden.'¹ With respectable appearance, he said, one manages to disguise 'the devil himself.' But Shakespeare will not have it that the criminal can in reality be other than a miserable man. And in the scene before us, his determination to set forth fully the conflict that may proceed in the criminal's soul leads him to attribute to Claudius not only such capacity for introspective analysis, but also such acquaintance with theological conceptions, and

(II. ii. 258-266, and III. ii. 355-7). So he was actually threatening to kill the King! And the close of the dumb-show doubtless meant that after the regicide he hoped to conciliate his mother. The twins are alert now, and concerned for His Majesty's safety. Then 'Lucianus' enters; and Hamlet's explanation that he is 'nephew to the king' renders the matter perfectly clear—Lucianus is Hamlet.

¹ III. i. 49-54.

such accurate knowledge of ethics, as might appear scarcely consistent with the character.¹

The position of Claudius has many ancient and modern analogues. It is the same as that of the culprit who upon hearing a mission preacher's appeal is convicted of his sins, feeling just as if they were being publicly exposed, because they are being exposed to his own gaze, which has hitherto been turned away from the unpleasant sight of them. Claudius feels that 'Heaven' knows of his 'offence,' that God has 'smelt' it, and has caused it to be mirrored in the play. So he has an 'inclination' to 'pray,' a sense of the need of reconciliation. This sense, this inclination, the argument discriminates from a right direction

¹ Claudius is not unintellectual. But I think it is unnatural for him, while engaged in spiritual conflict, to be at the same time engaged in philosophically analysing his conflicting thoughts and feelings, in following intellectually the course of the conflict stage by stage. The following theory therefore suggests itself. Just as it is not always necessary to suppose the words in a dramatic *aside* to be actually uttered, the words being given merely to show the course of thoughts which otherwise we might miss; even so, why not suppose Claudius's soliloquy to be there merely to show the nature of the spiritual conflict which Shakespeare, not Claudius, is determined to analyse? If the dramatist made use of a classical Chorus, then Claudius might remain silent, while it could declare, in the third person, what was going on in his mind. As he does not make use of such an expedient, there is no method by which he can set forth the nature of the conflict, save by putting into the lips of Claudius language that is not really Claudius's but his own.

But I would add that it will scarcely do to make of this a general theory of dramatic soliloquy: if proof is required that it could not be applied to Hamlet's own case, this will be found in II. ii. 61.

of the 'will': Desire, it says (following the important ethical distinction), is not Will, though on account of its motive power it may seem 'as sharp.' Claudius's 'guilt,' standing not in his past crime but in the present attitude of his will, which is set upon keeping his crown, is 'stronger' than the inclination¹ to turn to God. Wish and Will thus come into conflict when moral decision is required; and Will decides the issue. Claudius says he would like to have his soul 'washed' and made clean: for is it not declared that though red like crimson with a 'brother's blood,' it can be washed 'as white as snow'?² What is 'mercy' for, but to 'confront' the need of the 'offender'? 'Prayer,' the argument continues, is either for preventing or 'forestalling' grace, to keep us from 'coming to fall,' or else for mercy, for 'pardon,' we 'being down.' So Claudius will pray. Now, says he, 'my fault is past'! But so optimistic a reflection may require to be explained. The theory of prayer

¹ In this one line the argument seems to go astray; for 'intent' means 'intention,' and intention involves the concentration of the will upon an object. The word wanted is 'inclination' or 'tendency'; and I have therefore treated 'intent' as though equivalent to 'inclination,' which strictly it is not.

² The words occur twice, viz. Psalm li. 7 and Isaiah i. 18. The peculiar appropriateness of Claudius's reminiscence will be recognised when I point out that Psalm li was (according to the title) written by King David in contrition over the sin which is that of King Claudius, the murder of a man with a view to securing possession of his wife. In the other passage (Isaiah i. 18) bloodguiltiness would seem to be again in view: 'your hands are full of blood' (verse 15).

implied in it is that it is not what one says to God that matters, but the state of mind in which one approaches Him, and which finds expression in saying something or other: the doctrine is that it is the intention that matters. As for the prodigal son who has resolved to return to his father, before he has accomplished the return his 'fault is past': as for Claudius who has decided to 'look up,' the 'fault is past,' in his case too, the offence is wiped away. But such optimism is in this case (as he discovers) unjustified. All the criminal could pray for is 'forgiveness' of his 'murder'; and he cannot but be aware that forgiveness would be contingent upon his no longer 'retaining' what he 'possesses' through the crime. 'Justice' in 'this world's' courts may be 'shoved aside' by the man with the 'gilded palm': the thief may use a portion of his 'prize' to bribe the judge: but before God 'there is no shuffling.' 'What then?' If prayer for forgiveness will not do, 'what rests'? 'Repentance,' he says. That is something different. That would make matters right. But that would involve more than Claudius is prepared for: repentance is impossible. 'O soul agonising to rise heavenwards,' he cries, 'O bird struggling to reach thy proper element, thou art held fast by the birdlime!' Unable in his misery to get to God direct, he calls upon the mediation of 'angels'; and then, some feeling of peace stealing over his senses with the thought that

'all may be well,' he commences to utter 'words' of prayer: but as 'words' are all he can attain to, he is soon to rise aware that it is vain. And the result of the experience through which he has passed will ere long be manifested in his life.

Hamlet, in the meantime entering, has impulsively drawn his sword; but upon a moment's reflection he has seen cause to speedily re-sheathe it (l. 88), having caught sight of and grasped an excuse for procrastinating once more. It is true that he has been feeling capable of 'drinking hot blood' and 'doing horrid business'; but he has not been thinking just now of killing Claudius. The excuse that he seizes upon for postponing this impossible deed is that the revenge would be insufficient; the savage nature of the excuse being due to the savage mood in which Hamlet found himself to be and by which he has felt his mother's life to be endangered: but if that excuse were not available, some other would be discovered, for although the deed is never to be repudiated it is ever to be postponed for some distant opportunity. It is now easy to procrastinate, in fact impossible to do aught else. Besides, Hamlet's 'mother' is 'waiting' (l. 95), and he has his sermon ready to preach. It is unpleasant when one has set oneself an important task to be reminded on the way to it of a still more important duty which conflicts with it and which has long been craving attention. But Hamlet has found an excuse; and so he passes on.

The situation is serious in the highest degree. We are reaching the centre of the plot, the vertex of this tragedy of inefficiency, the turning-point in the career of the hero. For whereas, in Shakespeare's plan, the third act as a whole is to give us the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end, we are now just reaching the centre of that central act. The scene we have considered is the end of the beginning: the scene we are about to consider is the beginning of the end.¹ Every opportunity given him by a favourable Fate, Hamlet has missed; and now his chances are gone by. Fate is now to turn against him. If with deliberation he will not slay the right man, then without deliberation he shall now slay the wrong man. And the slaying of the wrong man is to involve in its train Hamlet's doom: it is to be the beginning of the end.

The scene of Hamlet's interview with his mother shows him engaged in the thoroughly congenial work of preaching morality. She sent for
Sc. iv. him to tell him that he had 'much offended'

Claudius: but Hamlet has come to lecture, not to be lectured to; he has come to convict her of being her 'husband's brother's wife,' to press home the lesson to which he devoted the greater part of his play.² But at the very commencement of the interview, the murderous feeling, to which

¹ See p. 133-5, where this point has already been dealt with.

² Upon his use throughout this interview of 'mother' and 'lady' in addressing her, see p. 61 n.

he made reference at the close of Sc. ii finds vent in the slaying of Polonius.¹ About this 'rash and bloody deed' Hamlet is insanely unconcerned; for in comparison with his very serious task of securing that his mother shall repent, there is nothing else that matters.² 'You call this "a bloody deed,"' he says; 'then what do you think about "killing a king and marrying his brother"?' Thus he repeats the insinuation which occurred in one passage in his play, that his mother was in a measure responsible for his father's death. It is in perfect harmony with what we learned from the sub-play, that beyond this vague suggestion of the adultery there is in Hamlet's discourse no reference whatever thereto.³

¹ I fear some may be disposed to understand the words, 'I took thee for thy better,' to mean that Hamlet, supposing Claudius to be behind the arras, deliberately seized this opportunity to rid him of his foe. I am convinced that the passage does not mean this. If it did, then to his mother's cry 'What hast thou done?' he should reply, 'Well, I have hopes that I have slain the king'; but what he did reply was, 'Nay, I know not'; and it was not till then—after a pause, represented in the usual manner by a broken line, two syllables being omitted in the middle—that it struck him that possibly it might be Claudius. 'I took thee for thy better' means *just now*, means *upon reflection, post factum*. Or if Hamlet was trying to justify himself by saying he thought, when he made the thrust, that it was Claudius, then he was deceiving himself: he did not think it was Claudius until afterwards.

² The reason for Gertrude's fear, which led her to cry for 'help' before the deed of blood, has been dealt with, pp. 164-5. The footnote to p. 164 explains why she is no longer frightened after the deed. But I have not yet understood why she is so little concerned about it: how is it that she can attend to Hamlet's lecture with that dead body lying there? She does not appear to feel exactly dazed.

³ See pp. 157-8.

What he proceeds to accuse her of is an offence against 'modesty' and 'love,' an 'act' that belies the 'marriage vow,' making it worth no more, he says, than the 'oaths' of men so irreligious as to play games of chance! 'Oh,' it is 'a deed' that, making marriage but a civil 'contract,' deprives it of its sacramental character—the worth of which aspect of marriage is in relation to the other as the worth of 'the very soul' in relation to the mere 'body'; it reduces the solemnisation of holy matrimony conducted by 'sweet religion,' to a meaningless form 'of words'; it makes 'heaven' blush, and the world look 'tristful,' as though the 'Day of Judgment' could not be much longer delayed. And then the Queen breaks in: 'Ay me, what act is this?' No, madam, it is not to adultery that Hamlet is referring. A second marriage, he said in Act I, gives the lie to all tears shed over the first husband's death: a second marriage, he said in the sub-play, cannot possibly be for love: a second marriage, he would now say again, is offence enough to render it unnecessary for him to dwell much even upon the fact of this marriage being within prohibited degrees of affinity. Such is the temper of our idealist, our hopelessly unpractical theorist. Is it any wonder if he should make a failure of life in this work-a-day world? Yet he is a successful preacher, his lecture carrying conviction to the Queen even as his play did to the King. 'I will speak daggers to her,' said he as he

went to her ;¹ ' these words like daggers enter in mine ears,' says she (l. 95). He has ' turned her eyes into her very soul,' into which she of late avoided looking because what was there to be seen was not pleasant to see : ' black spots,' fast dyed, she says. As the Queen's conscience has now been reached, the preacher can proceed to press for the dissolution of her marriage upon the ground that—the apparent sanction of ' sweet religion ' notwithstanding—it is a case of mere cohabitation, the discontinuance of which is imperatively demanded by ' virtue ' ;² for he must be taking for granted that she admits the cogency of his plea of nullity, the only plea upon which it would be possible thus to urge the separation.

The sermon may be having an excellent effect so far as the audience is concerned ; but it is otherwise as to the preacher himself. Humble hitherto, even inclined, with the well-known tendency of piety, to exaggerate his shortcomings, he now, falling into a preacher's snare, comes to feel while he preaches as though he were the embodiment of ' virtue ' and his audience the embodiment of

¹ III. ii. 414.

² It was a contrary opinion that Hamlet's University expressed upon this point in the case of Queen Catharine ; and I have felt disposed to make something of the fact that our moralist was so lacking in the judicious empiricism of a casuist, was so doctrinaire, that he would have pronounced for the dissolution of that marriage upon abstract grounds of morality. This, however, is not a sound position ; for the dramatist takes for granted not that Hamlet's view was wrong but that it was right. See Appendix B.

'vice' (l. 154). 'Sinner!' he says, 'I want to do you good: "forgive" my speaking strongly, it is because I am so "virtuous."' In grim irony the dramatist has caused Hamlet to speak of himself for the first time in self-praise, just when he now for the first time has in culpable folly committed so serious a crime as manslaughter. But he will be competent to explain his attitude of indifference towards that act presently.

At this point the Queen cries out, 'O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain!' So he pulls up at once, after responding, 'Oh, throw away the worser part of it, and live the purer with the other half.' He has been telling her (l. 149) that it is to God that she must 'confess herself'; and now he feels he can safely leave her. His sermon has reached an appropriate termination, and the preacher says 'Goodnight' (l. 159). But here an important point of ethical doctrine occurs to him, and he is obliged to resume his discourse to touch upon the moral function of good habits (ll. 162-70). Hateful though he by nature finds hypocrisy and all pretence, nevertheless, in view of the moral problem that faces him, practical and urgent, he is able to recognise the ethical value for practical purposes of an 'assumption of virtue' on the part of one who 'has it not' (l. 160).¹ Against the power of

¹ 'To pretend to be good is often the best ladder a soul can find from the pit of perdition. . . . To be mindful of the censure of neighbours is one way of confessing to oneself the sovereignty of conscience.' (H. Begbie, *In the Hand of the Potter*, pp. 87-8.)

'custom,' which, swallowing up 'all sensibility' (l. 161), enables people to do wrong without self-reproach, Hamlet has set himself in opposition. Yet it must be admitted, he says, and insisted upon, that custom has its place in the scheme of things and possesses ethical value.¹ To get good habits helps insensibly towards the building up of a good life. 'Nature' has 'stamped' her impress upon one (l. 168), which can be 'almost changed' by getting oneself into good habits, 'the devil' of one's bad nature being thus 'thrown out.'

Now he has done. So he says 'Once more, good night' (l. 170), only adding that he will be prepared to recognise thankfully any signs of aspiration on the part of the penitent, and will feel that such a state of mind would raise her high enough for him to seek of her once more a mother's blessing. As he turns to go, he remembers about Polonius, and is detained by the sense that that rapier thrust demands some sort of apology. Hamlet, the man of ethical principle, the lover of 'sweet religion,' has been engaged in preaching high morality; and the dramatist, in his irony, has

¹ His opinions will be found in accord with present-day philosophy. See, for example, the chapter on Habit in James's *Principles of Psychology*, vol. i. Dr. James, after pointing out that every deed done, every thought harboured, leaves an impress upon character, proceeds thus: 'Of course, this has its good side as well as its bad one. As we become permanent drunkards by so many separate drinks, so we become saints . . . by so many separate acts' (p. 127). And again: 'Every day during which a breakdown is postponed adds to the chances of its not occurring at all' (p. 123).

made him while so engaged do a deed only fit for man without religion or high principle. And he makes him now relieve himself of responsibility by piously attributing his 'rash and bloody deed' to the good 'pleasure' of 'Heaven' (l. 173.) Even though he says he 'repents,' anyone can see that it is not much of a repentance; for, conscious that he scarcely did this deed as the result of deliberation and voluntary decision, he feels that in it he has acted but as a 'scourge' in the hand of 'God,' whose will it evidently was that Polonius should die thus. Now there may indeed be 'a special providence' even in 'the fall' of a Polonius: but nothing is more dangerous than that a man should ascribe his moral actions to the will of God, for nothing else will so surely relieve the moral agent of the sense of responsibility, and thus render him something less than a man.¹

The Polonius affair being thus disposed of, the interview is to terminate. So Hamlet for a third time says 'Good night' (l. 177); and he says to himself as he goes that such severity as his is the truest 'kindness' when dealing with a hardened conscience, adding that the slaying of Polonius may be 'bad,' but a 'worse' deed of blood 'remains' to be done. His couplet sums up all that has occurred during

¹ The slaying of Polonius was an act of madness—was the result of lack of self-control. But it does not follow that Hamlet was not in some measure responsible. For he resolved in Act I, Sc. v, to let himself go; and that is what he has done, so disastrously.

the interview, which suggests that Shakespeare originally intended the scene to end at this point, closing it after his manner with a rhymed couplet. But if so, he felt how hard it must be for Hamlet to tear himself away from so congenial an occupation as the preaching; more particularly as an uncongenial thought, the death of Claudius, has just presented itself. So Hamlet turns back to say 'one word more,' and asks his mother to keep to herself the knowledge which he supposes her to possess, that he has been only pretending to be mad; ¹ though unfortunately he could not ask her to think that he has only pretended to kill Polonius. So the conversation drifts on, until for a fourth and a fifth time he has said 'Good night.'

It has yet to be noted that in the course of this scene the ghost has put in an appearance. Upon seeing it, Hamlet feels for a moment, as he felt for a moment upon the first occasion of its appearing, the mystery of the invisible world; and thrilled now, as then, by the feeling of that mystery, he calls, as then, upon the angelic inhabitants of that invisible world for protection. But that flutter of feeling is soon past. Now for what reason has the ghost appeared? At the commencement of the plot it came, to state the motive, and to start

¹ It was all-important (ll. 144-9) that she should not consider him mad. He thought to prove (ll. 140-4) that he was not mad by declaring that he knew what he was saying. It would have been more to the point to have proved—if he could!—that he had self-control. See *ante*, pp. 85-7, 152-3.

the action ; so now, immediately after the centre of the plot, it has come again, to re-state the motive and if possible to re-start the action, or if that is not possible, then to emphasise the inaction. Its coming shows very clearly that in Hamlet's sub-consciousness, easily to be called to the surface of consciousness for a moment, but not to be retained there, there is still the sense that the deed which he is so intent upon doing is not the deed that he is responsible to do : he has 'let go by the important acting of the dread command.' But the disappointed ghost, having little or nothing to say, directs him to 'speak to' his 'mother' : a direction most inopportune, most indiscreet ; for Hamlet was 'speaking to' her before, and he is now given a good ground for resuming his discourse as though the ghost had not appeared at all. 'This visitation' was intended—was it?—'to whet his almost blunted purpose' : but that is quite impossible of achievement now : so all goes on as though the visitation had not taken place.¹

At the close of the scene, Hamlet is in a very cheerful mood, his lecture—in which he has been able to let himself go very freely indeed upon the lines of his natural bent—having proved just as successful as his play performed before the King. And if he now must set out 'for England' (l. 199), it is with assurance of his own capacity for 'plot-

¹ See further, on the character of the apparition, Appendix D.

ting' (l. 211), and with a sense of the artistic attractiveness¹ of a contest in 'craftiness' between himself and Claudius. Something of his 'antic disposition' comes upon him as he looks, somewhat amused, at the dead Polonius;² for there is the fussy and garrulous old man perfectly 'still' at last, able to keep 'secrets' at last, and looking quite serious: a humorous situation! Now is there any hope for such a Hamlet?

According to the traditional scheme, followed, in the absence of any early evidence respecting the division,³ by all our modern texts, the next scene opens the fourth act. It **Act IV**, certainly must have belonged, in Shake- **Sc. i, ii.** speare's plan, to Act III. It follows closely upon Sc. iv. This scene requires no further comment than to point out that of course there is no truth in Gertrude's statement that Hamlet 'weeps for what is done.'

That which follows it, our Act IV, Sc. ii, must

¹ That is the meaning of the abstract form in which it is put. He might have said: 'Oh, 'twill be sweet, When Claudius at his own game I defeat'; but he puts the situation, instead, in its abstract and generic relation; he refers, as an interested student of human nature, to all such cases as forming a particularly amusing or attractive class of cases.

² As we say farewell to Polonius, it is worth while to remark that in his opinion his King and his God had equal rights to the possession of his soul (II. ii. 44-5); for he lived in Tudor times. But by 1623 this seemed extravagant; and the editors of the First Folio, greatly shocked, deprived the King, by a curious emendation, of his half-share in his courtier's soul.

³ See further, on this subject, pp. 128-33, 186-8, and Appendix A.

also in Shakespeare's plan belong to Act III. It shows the corpse disposed of, and Hamlet more erratic than ever, befooling Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, while telling them some home truths about their 'sponging' upon the King; finally, after pretending that he will accompany them, he eludes them and runs away, the two courtiers in pursuit, 'fox and hounds.'

Here is the fit ending for Act III. The moral centre of the play is past. Between the letting off of Claudius and the killing of Polonius is the centre of the plot. These two errors—one of omission, one of commission—are to involve the doom of Hamlet. He is on the downgrade now. The next scene will start a new action, will commence the preparations for the catastrophe; and this will form a fit beginning for the fourth act.

The structure of the central act in *HAMLET* may be profitably compared with that of the central act in some other play. Take, for example, *MACBETH*. There, as here, the two central scenes of the central act give the moral centre and turning-point. The death of Banquo (corresponding in position with the letting off of Claudius) and the events of the banquet scene jointly involve the doom of Macbeth. The close of the second of these two central scenes shows, as does the corresponding passage in *Hamlet*, how clearly the hero is on the downgrade now. All that remains is to terminate the act with two scenes, corresponding with the

two scenes in HAMLET. For the first of them shows a force which 'this night will spend into a dismal and a fearful end,' with a view to the morrow 'morning' when the process of 'drawing' Macbeth 'on to his confusion' will begin; just as the first of the two scenes in HAMLET shows Claudius who is spending the night with his 'soul full of discord and dismay' and is looking forward to the morning (l. 29) when his plan which will draw Hamlet to confusion will be set in motion (l. 30). And the second of the two scenes shows, as does the second of the two in HAMLET, that the case of the hero is getting pretty desperate already. Act III of MACBETH thus terminates; and Act IV opens with the commencement of preparations for the catastrophe. This tragedy may thus be compared in some detail, as to its structure, with the tragedy of HAMLET, although the themes and motives of the two plays differ so widely. There are other plays also in which Shakespeare's structural method may be studied with similar results.

THE FOURTH ACT

NOTHING is more natural than for a reader to feel that any time expended upon reading Shakespeare-criticism would be better expended upon reading Shakespeare. If there must be this horde of commentators, he might say, let them limit themselves to the work of securing a perfect text, and let them eschew æsthetic criticism, that everyone may obtain at first hand, direct from Shakespeare, the impressions which the dramatist desired to convey. Nothing more natural than such a feeling ; for how could any play be supposed to be the better for a commentary of the length, for instance, of this one ? Yet however natural the feeling, it is due to lack of familiarity with Shakespeare's work, a profounder study of which would correct it. The casual reader, like the playgoer, gets an impression of a character in a play, or of the general trend of the play, and if he is a journalist he may set forth his impressions in article or essay. But he does not know that this strange dramatist has so much matter of highest psychological value to set forth, that much of it has to find expression in quite unemphatic words and phrases which one

might read a hundred times without pausing to consider that they may have a meaning ; nor that the aspects of human character, the phases of human experience, which lay open to Shakespeare, over and above those with which his reader is familiar, were innumerable and of infinite complexity.

It may be said, indeed, that most of the critical writings upon Shakespeare, which are not merely textual but dramatic or æsthetic, are what may be described as impressionist in character. As such they vary much in value : from the mediocrity of journalism, often very popular but always of limited worth, they are to be found ranged in ascending scale up to the visions of seers, which are of incalculable worth, as well as in descending scale to mere imbecility. But if this book is not written in vain, one point which it will have made clear is that impressionism will not suffice for the criticism of the greatest plays. It is not that it misses a detail the value of which may speculatively be reckoned high, but that it is liable to miss whole series of details the cumulative effect of which should be, not speculatively but with certainty, greatly to modify the character estimates of first impressions. An interesting example, which shows well not only of what quality are the points that readers miss, but how it is that they miss them, is to be found in Ophelia's lament in Act III, Sc. i. What is it that impresses us there ? The pathos of Ophelia's situation, the depth of her

sorrow, the poetry of her lamentation : these appeal, as they are intended to appeal, to the feelings of the theatrical audience ; and these appeal to the feelings of readers too, the result being—a result unavoidable in the theatre, but avoidable, one would suppose, in the study—that there is no desire to criticise, that reason is quiescent. Ophelia's description of Hamlet scarcely arrests our attention, scarcely contributes to the total general impression. Our feelings are so affected by a situation that we are unaware that Shakespeare is engaged with a character : we do not expect detail just here to be the revelation of character. Thus, while enjoying the passage and obtaining from it its other values, we miss its character value, which is in drama the most important thing. When this has occurred in passage after passage through the play, we arrive in the end at character estimates for which we are more indebted to our sensibility than to the reason and imagination to which Shakespeare makes his special appeal. Thus a rational and imaginative criticism is required to correct impressions of readers and playgoers by turning them to the serious study of Shakespeare.

A second point which perhaps this book will have helped to make clear is the importance, oft herein referred to, of Shakespeare's methodical plot-structure. The general reader cannot discover it for himself, and criticism has ignored it.¹ To apprehend

¹ There are exceptions. Moulton's work, *Shakespeare as a*

it does much more than show us Shakespeare to be regular and orderly in his work with the regularity and order of a classical genius; for in addition to that, by exhibiting his manner of regarding his theme for the purpose of orderly division, it renders clearer his attitude towards and his treatment of character and destiny. Everyone knows that between two acts there is supposed to be a break rather more marked in character than that between two scenes in an act.¹ But how definite is the volume of content of each act in Shakespeare's normal scheme is seldom recognised; and the care which he frequently takes to marshal the details of the central act is ignored. The result is that the division between Acts III and IV in

Dramatic Artist, is of value in this connection. More recently, Mr. Bradley, in his important lectures on *Shakespearean Tragedy*, has treated of it with interesting results, from a standpoint which differs from mine. I have dealt further with the subject in Appendix A.

¹ The true nature of that break which is 'rather more marked' requires to be clearly apprehended. For it has not any necessary connection with a break in *time*. The plot of *MACBETH* is constructed with very special care; and the action with which Act IV opens is within a few hours of that represented at the close of Act III, whereas during the course of Act IV there is a considerable interval of time between two scenes. The plot of *CORIOLANUS* presents a precisely similar phenomenon. So does that of *HAMLET*. For the time represented by the opening of Act IV is within a very few hours of the close of Act III; whereas there is a considerable gap in time in the course of the act, namely between our Sc. iv and v.

It is the reaching of a fresh stage in the plot that characterises the opening of a fresh act; and if the break often corresponds with a break in time, that is because the interval is often what allows of the plot's reaching a fresh stage.

HAMLET has not been treated as a matter of much consequence.¹

In JULIUS CÆSAR, the fourth act opens with the planning of Antony and Octavius, which commences the preparations (hinted at at the close of the penultimate scene of Act III) leading up to the catastrophe of Act V. In MACBETH, likewise, the fourth act opens with preparations upon the supernatural plane (hinted at in the penultimate scene of Act III) for the catastrophe of Act V. Why then should not the fourth act of HAMLET commence with our Act IV, Sc. iii? For thus it would in like manner open with a new movement (hinted at in what would then be the penultimate scene of Act III), even the despatching of Hamlet to England; which now is seen to be a plot for Hamlet's destruction, and which is the first step in the preparations—preparations which occupy all Act IV—for the catastrophe of Act V. Even as CORIOLANUS Act IV opens with the farewell of Coriolanus and his setting out from Rome, so HAMLET Act IV may well open with the farewell of Hamlet and his setting out from Denmark. The setting out is, in each case, the beginning of a new movement leading towards the tragic end.

The scene, then, with which according to this theory Shakespeare intended the fourth act
Sc. iii. to open, is the one known to us as Act IV,
 Sc. iii. Claudius, whose 'soul,' when last we saw him, was 'full of discord and dismay'

¹ The subject has been already dealt with, pp. 128-33, 181.

(our IV. i. 45), has now in the presence of his ' wisest friends ' (*id.* 38) recovered his wonted self-possession and kingly dignity: he has hit upon a plan in secret, and he will have Hamlet soon put to death.¹ Throughout three whole acts, while Hamlet has been having his chances, Claudius has been passive. His policy has been, having got the crown, to keep and enjoy it ; and although his enjoyment has been interrupted by concern about Hamlet, he has until now taken no active step. Henceforth it will be otherwise ; for it is his turn to take action now.

In the course of the scene, Hamlet appears before the King. When he was in that optimistic mood that resulted from the satisfactory nature of his interview with his mother, he assured her that he would be able to ' answer well ' for ' the death he gave ' Polonius (III. iv. 176). But he makes no attempt whatever at so doing: the ' antic disposition ' which is the settled habit of his soul precludes explanation of conduct ; and all he does is to jest. The passage affords an interesting illustration of what some earlier passages in the play have already been made use of to set forth ; namely that the dramatist may be said to be not so much writing about a character as himself impersonating a character. Even in a jest the jester's past career may be involved ; and the dramatist has put himself so completely, for the moment, into the position of the *dramatis persona*, that all that has gone to make the latter what he is, including all his

¹ See p. 166 *n.*, and pp. 191-2.

past career, is at the moment entered into and appropriated by the dramatist in the fulness of his dramatic sympathy. Hamlet's jocular allusion to the 'Emperor' and his 'convocation' of 'politic' rulers at the 'Diet' of 'Worms' may be inept, irrelevant, may be as senseless as puns usually are; yet there is no other character in drama to whom the allusions in that pun would be as appropriate as they are to Hamlet. Educated as he was at the University of Wittenberg, his jest implies a train of reminiscence. For though there may have been other Diets of Worms, there was one which, as an episode of greatest moment in a strife fraught with tremendous consequences, was to have its fame spread throughout all time; and the University of Wittenberg was the community to which at the start it meant more than to any other; for that Diet was the one before which Luther was summoned to appear, Luther of Wittenberg.

It would be well before passing on from this scene to reflect further upon the state of Claudius's mind, seeing that to him belongs, in the main, this fourth act upon which we have now entered. His soliloquy in the previous act expressed a wish to pray: his present soliloquy expresses a determination to commit murder. The explanation of this remarkable contrast is to be found in the nature of a moral situation such as that of Act III, Sc. iii. The essentials of a moral situation are that it

involves a choice, and that while on the surface the only question is what the agent shall *do*, under the surface there is the more serious question what the agent shall *be*. For when incompatible ends have to be compared as to their worth, there is no possible common denominator to be found except by deciding, even if only half-consciously deciding, what sort of character is most to be prized. The choice is between two selves ; and its importance is in its relation to the subsequent life : what is being decided is what kind of character shall be operative.¹ Claudius had a sense of the need of reconciliation, the condition of which, *sine qua non*, is for him renunciation, and the concomitant of which for him would be peace. Weighing all this in the balances of moral worth against the kingship, he found that the latter sank the scale ; so he decided to hold to that. It is because one cannot be just the same after so self-conscious a decision as before it that Claudius has now fallen lower, and has now

¹ These remarks are based upon Dewey and Tufts, *Ethics*, Chap. X. So, too, W. James writes : ' We are spinning our own fates. . . . Every smallest stroke of vice leaves its never so little scar . . . down among his nerve-cells and fibres the molecules are registering and storing it up to be used against him when the next temptation comes.' (*Principles of Psychology*, vol. i. p. 127.) And Dr. D'Arcy, Bishop of Down, writes : ' Character is always in the making. Every decision of the will adds to it a new element of strength or weakness. . . . Thus is the man made by his reaction upon his experiences. . . . The result is . . . a state in which character is hardened into permanence.' (*Christian Ethics*, pp. 68-9.)

Hamlet's own remarks upon the subject (III. iii. 161-5) are to the same effect.

resolved that a second murder is necessary for his 'joy' (l. 70).

It is noticeable that throughout the play what Shakespeare has set forth about Claudius counts for little with most of us, because we are preoccupied with Hamlet; yet he has give enough material to expand into a new play—HAMLET with the Prince of Denmark almost left out, and the Ghost altogether left out. 'The Tragedy of *Claudius King of Denmark*.' The action would begin some two and a half months farther back than the action in HAMLET, and it would proceed on something like the following lines:

ACT I. Claudius, brother of the King of Denmark, having (before the action commences) established guilty relations with his brother's wife (ref. HAMLET, I. v. 42-7), commences to aspire to the crown, and plans the murder of his brother. The latter is represented as of 'goodly' appearance, comparable to 'Hyperion' or to 'Jove' (ref. HAMLET, II. iv. 55-62), as a faithful and loving husband (ref. HAMLET, I. v. 48-50; III. iv. 112-15), and above all as 'martial' and 'valiant,' so fond in fact of fighting that in his younger days having staked a 'moiety' of his kingdom (ref. HAMLET, I. i. 85-95) upon the result of a duel, he was engaged in fighting that duel upon the day of his wife's confinement (ref. HAMLET, V. i. 156-61). Many other details respecting him and his court are also given (ref. HAMLET, I. iv. 15; III. iii. 81). ACT II. The

fratricide (ref. HAMLET, I. v. 59-73 ; III. ii. 254-71) having been successfully accomplished, Claudius is elected (ref. HAMLET, V. ii. 65) king, and after consultation with his advisers (ref. HAMLET, I. ii. 14-16) marries his late brother's wife. In spite of debauchery (ref. HAMLET, I. iv. 8-10 ; III. iii. 89), he proves a capable and dignified sovereign (ref. HAMLET, I. ii. 1-128 ; II. ii. 1-85 ; IV. v. 121-7), full of tact (ref. HAMLET, I. ii. 87-118 as contrasted with 68-73). But in the secret of his inner life he is a miserable man, bearing in the remembrance of his 'ugly deed' a 'heavy burden' (ref. HAMLET, III. i. 50-4). The belated arrival, from a foreign university, of the murdered man's son—a scholar of peculiar temper, who resembles his father in no particular save in being bearded (ref. HAMLET, I. ii. 240 and II. ii. 600) and having curly hair (ref. HAMLET, III. iv. 56 and I. v. 18)—has increased his uneasiness. Towards this man he is anxious to act courteously: he would wish to make some amends: he goes so far as to declare him heir to the throne (ref. HAMLET, I. ii. 109), and to offer him a position (l. 122) of nominal equality with himself.

ACT III. The distress of Claudius increases. Compromise becomes impossible (ref. HAMLET, III. iii. 37-72); he almost reaches the point of repentance: finally he resolves that, come what may, he will keep his crown. So he must go forwards in crime: 'returning were more tedious than go o'er.' Act IV. Claudius therefore resolves upon the destruction

of the one who ought to be on the throne, and whose existence reminds him of his misdeeds. He is a new man since his important decision in the previous act: he can go on with confidence, conscience no longer causing him any trouble. While he is planning how to compass the destruction of his enemy, one who has a private grudge against that young man opportunely presents himself, and is found willing to conspire with him to assassinate his foe. ACT V. The fresh murder is successfully accomplished; but it involves the doom of the assassins.¹

There is a remarkable expedient of Shakespeare's which engaged a moment's attention in the study of Act I. It consists in representing
Sc. iv. the situation of the hero as being analogous in certain particulars to the situations of two others. This expedient was resorted to in the first two scenes of the play. On the one hand, just as Hamlet, nephew of the present King of Denmark, was the son of the late King Hamlet; just so, Fortinbras, nephew of the present King of Norway, was son of the late King Fortinbras. On the other hand, just as Hamlet was a university man who had come from abroad to attend the funeral and the coronation, and would, if he had his choice, return to his university life; just so,

¹ In the *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. v., pp. 200-2, Professor Saintsbury has somewhat similarly sketched the character of Claudius.

Laertes was a university man who had come from abroad for the same purpose, and who would likewise, if he had his choice, return to his university life. In the second act, we were reminded of these two, Laertes and Fortinbras, in Sc. i and the beginning of Sc. ii. Since then we heard no more of them; in Act III there was no mention of them. But now they are both to be introduced again, as they have a highly important function to fulfil in relation to the last two acts, in relation, that is to say, to the end and the preparations for the end. As in the first act, we are to have in one scene Fortinbras, and in the next Laertes. The resemblance between Fortinbras and Hamlet in respect of situation is changing to a contrast in respect of conduct. Hamlet and his escort are on the move, going out of Denmark; Fortinbras and his company are on the move too, but in a contrary direction. Fortinbras had started by planning an 'assay of arms' against Denmark; his purpose in which having been frustrated, he next secured from his uncle an allowance of five thousand a year, and went 'softly on' to gain 'a little patch of ground' in Poland. Militarism of this sort, remarks Hamlet the moralist in passing, is an unhealthy sign (ll. 27-9), suggesting some disease, unrecognised but likely to prove fatal, in the healthy-looking and wealthy body politic. But is that 'little patch of ground' all that Fortinbras is going to 'gain'? Is it not a crown, if the truth

were known, and a territory greater than his father's? We shall see: in the meantime he is 'going softly on.'

Hamlet very naturally contrasts this man's vigour with his own inactivity. In Act II the 'occasion' that 'informed against him' drove him to conclude, in spite of himself, that his failure must be due to cowardice (II. ii. 598-608). In Act III he said again that it must be cowardice that deterred him from an 'enterprise of great pitch and moment.' And now in Act IV he does not know, he says, whether it is cowardice or not that deters him from revenge. If not that—not the 'craven scruple of thinking too precisely on the issue' of the contemplated act—then it must be his 'oblivion,' in that like 'a beast' he does but 'sleep and feed.' Man was made for something better. The 'discursive' power of the intellect (l. 36), which, transcending limitations of animal life, 'looks' beyond the present to the future and the past (l. 37)—reason, which confers upon man a 'likeness' to 'God' (l. 38)—this was given that it might be put to use. Such is the argument. But fancy Hamlet, of all men, accusing himself of not exercising his reasoning powers, of not looking beyond the present moment of animal existence to the 'before and after'! His inability to understand himself was seen by his earlier soliloquies: the mistakes of self-analysis could go no further than this. And he closes his soli-

loquy with the words, 'from this time forth, my thoughts be bloody or be nothing worth.' As in Act I, Sc. v, and on other occasions, so it is still: always his *thoughts*, never his deeds, are in question. Not only bloody thoughts, but also bloody deeds, are to proceed from Hamlet henceforth: yet even now it is only of 'thoughts' that he can think. So he passes on, unresisting, in the direction of his doom.¹

What that scene does for Fortinbras, the succeeding scene is to do for Laertes. In Act I or Act II there was a highly important difference between the situation of Hamlet and that of Laertes, in that Hamlet had a father's death to avenge. This difference has now been removed, and the analogy between the two cases has become complete, in that Laertes too has now a father's death to avenge. In this situation he behaves with unerring judgment. Having arrived 'in secret,' he makes full inquiries first, and then he succeeds in gathering a host that 'call him lord' and shout 'Laertes shall be king, Laertes king!' a 'rabble' which though 'riotous' he can control to perfection: 'stand without,' 'keep the door,' he commands, and they obey. So he breaks into the King's presence

¹ Why did Hamlet go off towards England thus? Because he always let himself go. It is the tragic *ἀμαρτία* which was exemplified at the close of the first act in the note-book incident and in the 'antic disposition,' and which has characterised him ever since.

to cry 'O thou vile king, give me my father!' to curse 'vows' of 'allegiance,' to defy 'conscience' and 'grace,' to 'dare damnation,' to say 'let come what comes, only I'll be revenged most thoroughly for my father.' Such, Shakespeare is saying, were the possibilities of the situation. Circumstances were in many respects more favourable in Hamlet's case. 'Antiquity,' as the Gentleman remarked (l. 104), had to be 'forgotten,' historical claims and hereditary rights ignored, before it could be suggested that Laertes should 'be king': but it certainly would not be so in Hamlet's case. And it ought to be much easier to get the crowd to support the Prince than to support the lord chamberlain's son; nor would there be any need for Hamlet to repudiate 'vows of allegiance' or to fling 'conscience and grace' to the devil, in order to take vengeance upon Claudius. But Hamlet has failed completely, and Laertes is on the way to success; though in the end, indeed, his readiness for treachery may destroy him, his 'foul practice' 'turning itself on him.'¹ Laertes enters now, full of fury, to demand satisfaction; yet he is willing to listen to reason: if Claudius has any explanation to offer, he will find a ready hearer. Was not Polonius entitled to the ascription of *esquire* and *armiger*? What did the King mean by neglecting the coat of arms? What must the dead man feel about so shabby a

¹ V. ii. 328.

funeral? In the fervid imagination of his son, he 'cries' out 'from heaven' (l. 216) against such an insult offered to a family entitled to bear arms. But King Claudius will give Laertes satisfaction. The perfect tact with which he has met him is noticeable. To the fury of Laertes he has been able to oppose his characteristic dignity and calm, even taking his stand upon the divine interest in kingship, upon the divine safeguarding which, though it somehow failed to protect his brother from his traitorous assault, can no doubt be relied upon (ll. 123-5) to protect the kingly person of the traitor.

But of most absorbing interest in this scene is the pathetic appearing of Ophelia, from which there is much to learn. Ophelia, pitiable, 'distract,' 'speaks things that carry but half sense'; but the words of the Queen's Gentleman (ll. 4-13) sound strange. For what can he mean by declaring that what Ophelia says 'would make one think there might be thought, though nothing sure, yet much unhappily?' Nothing sure? Does not grief for the death of her father appear to the Court the 'sure' ground of her loss of reason? If so, there would be no occasion to try to 'botch up her words' to some further meaning. It must be to something more mysterious than the fact of her father's death that he refers when he says her hearers are 'moved' to try and 'collect' a meaning from her words. Few of them these three centuries, indeed, have

been thus moved. Yet, if it be otherwise with us to-day, we shall find that having the advantage of knowing more of Ophelia's past than the Queen's Gentlemen could know, we shall at last, after these three centuries, find out the 'sense' of her 'doubtful' words.

Upon her first entrance, the presence of her lover's mother keeps Ophelia's poor wandering mind fixed for the moment upon her lover; upon her second entrance, the presence of her brother keeps it fixed upon her father. All that she says upon the first occasion has some relation to Hamlet.

Her first song tells of the lady who lost her pilgrim lover: 'he is dead and gone, lady,' dead and buried. She too has lost her lover, and though not by death, yet the feeling of loss in her heart is the same as the feeling of loss through death; besides which, an element of complexity is introduced by the mingling, in the mind of the insane, of things in their nature and origin distinct, so that, her affliction resulting from the death of a parent as well as from the loss of a lover, the two losses are not clearly distinguished; and it therefore appears that the lover has died. The lady in the song has been inquiring of a traveller for news of her lost lover; and he asks for a description:

How should I your true love know
From another one?

The man in question, traveller, is a pilgrim from the

Holy Land ; you would know him by the strangeness of his character and demeanour : he bears the pilgrim's insignia—a 'cockle' in his hat, and 'sandal shoon.' Ah ! says the traveller, he died on the 'mountain' pass ; his body was found in a 'winding-sheet' formed of the 'snow' through which the 'edelweiss' peeps. Alas that he went to his grave unbewept 'by true-love showers,' dying an unknown man in that foreign land !¹

Many an old song could be found that expressed sorrow upon the loss of a lover ; but what rendered this one appropriate to Ophelia's case was the resemblance which she traced between her lover and the lover in the song. The ballad gave expression to one of her moods in her reflections upon Hamlet. In that mood, she found an explanation of the melancholy and eccentricity which caused so much anxiety ; she saw, as we have had occasion also to see, that he was a man of peculiarly religious temper, and she thought that that would to some extent account for his idiosyncrasies. A mediæval pilgrim, separating himself from society, would perhaps meditate, with 'dejected haviour of the visage' and 'windy suspiration of forced breath,' upon

¹ The ending of the beautiful ballad has been rendered vapid and senseless by the almost universal omission of the word 'not' on the part of the editors. 'Which bewept to the grave did not go' they have changed to 'Which bewept to the grave did go' ; and this without any authority. But even the general drift of this wonderful song has, unfortunately, been missed hitherto. 'He is dead and gone, lady,' appears to have been taken by many as a remark of Ophelia's addressed to the Queen !

things connected with the Holy Land. Such a state of mind would account for Hamlet's appearing so much like a stranger to Danish society; he was more like a minister of religion than a military man, fitter for the cloister than the court. The old song was written about some mediæval person who was not unlike her lover. Ophelia in that mood, it may be observed, got nearer to the truth about Hamlet's temperament, than in the mood in which she represented him to herself as the model prince, the soldier and courtier, and leader of the fashions in gentlemen's apparel.

Such had been one of Ophelia's moods. But there was another and a darker mood, to the expression of which in another and a most woeful song she passes lightly, with the inconsequence of the crazy, upon the entrance of Claudius. What a 'document in madness' is this second song!

Many readers think of Ophelia as having remained unaffected by the terrible notions that Laertes and Polonius had sought to impress upon her: but how could that in truth have been the case? How could it be but that her thoughts would from time to time recur to this disagreeable topic? Whether at any time she did seriously suspect Hamlet's motives, as she was bid, and as Hamlet himself (we have seen)¹ believed her to suspect them, who shall say? Neither Shakespeare, at any rate, nor yet Ophelia. For Shakespeare is

¹ See pp. 141-3.

not engaged in discussing a character with us or in analysing it for us : his part as the perfect dramatist is, with complete dramatic objectivity, with unlimited imaginative sympathy, to impersonate the character, to become Ophelia himself for the time being ; what he thinks and says in the character is what Ophelia herself should think and say. So he may not even have stopped to consider whether her mind was vexed with genuine suspicions of this sort. For it would be most unlikely that Ophelia herself would try to analyse her thoughts and feelings. The text does not suggest that she ever made such an attempt. Rather is it to be supposed that, whenever those notions derived from her father and brother rose up into her consciousness, she would thrust them aside, suppress them. It was in spite of her, we may well surmise, that her mind would keep reverting to them from time to time. And when in spite of her it would do so, it would also, alas, recall the words of a song that it might have been better never to have heard—a horrid song which described a case just such as her friends had admonished her to consider. Then, when as the result of the grief, the shock, the overstrain—her father being slain by her lover—her mind had given way, these and the like thoughts became an obsession ; and the song whose ideas may before have been repulsed each time they presented themselves, now came up unhindered, unresisted, came up even in public with its unblushing

suggestion as to the nature of the evil that might befall her: 'Lord,' says she, 'we know what we are, but know not what we may become.' Strange things do happen, says she: once upon a time a young woman was turned into an owl.

Her ugly song told of a girl who, acting just as she had herself been only too plainly warned by Laertes not to act, listened (verse 1) 'with too credent ear' to the vows of the man, 'vows' that, to use the words of Polonius, were but 'springes to catch woodcocks.' So, having lost her heart, she lost her maidenhood; and her betrayer—men were deceivers ever, said Lord Hamlet¹—mocked her when she afterwards desired of him wedlock. The song was perfectly suited to the horrid circumstances of which they had told her. 'Indeed, la,' says she, 'I'll make an end of it': the end of it is the moral; the moral that there would have been a better chance for the maid to have married the man if at the start she had been 'somewhat scanter of her maiden presence.' The lover proved unworthy of confidence, and Ophelia's own lover has proved so too: they warned her that he would behave badly, and so he did—he has slain her father. Her distracted mind passes at once from the wrong done by the lover in the song to this wrong of the slaying of her father: 'I cannot choose but weep,' she says, 'to think they should lay him in the cold ground.' Without father or lover now, she

¹ III. i. 118, 131.

turns to Laertes, who shall be informed 'of it'; and then the thought of Laertes leads at once to the thought of his warnings: 'so I thank you, my brother, for your good counsel,' the counsel being not to trust Hamlet, who has since proved unworthy of trust.¹

Perhaps there is no need to dwell in so much detail upon the later appearance of Ophelia in the course of this scene. This time the presence of Laertes causes her poor wandering fancies to revolve around thoughts of home and the loss of their father. One reference to an abduction occurs (l. 173), but only by a casual and momentary digression. The pretty distribution of flowers recalls the emblematic values which were before her mind as she gathered them, and brings before us in all their pathos her mingled feelings of the double loss; for she carries the flower of remembrance, the flower of thought, the flower of sorrow, which we may when in a religious mood, she says,—Sundays only—call by its other name, associating with sorrow heavenly grace; and besides these three she brings three more, which as a matter of fact signify dissembling, unfaithfulness, the untrustworthiness of bachelors' promises: but while mentioning the

¹ It could only be a matter of speculation whether Shakespeare knew whither Ophelia's mind had wandered when she said: 'Come, my coach! Good night, sweet ladies, good night!' But I just mention that to my own fancy this represents the dream of a call upon the Court, paid by the bride of the Prince.

significance of the other three, to that of these three she does not now advert, the only loss of which she is at the moment conscious enough to be able to express it being that of her father: the violet, symbol of fidelity, she could not find, she said, because her father was dead. And it is to this loss, rather than that of a lover, that her snatches of song now relate. The presence of Laertes also suggests other home scenes: so at one moment, she fancies herself engaged in spinning (l. 172) and singing at her work; 'how well the spinning-wheel suits the song,' she says: and later on, again, as though back in the old days before her sorrows, she sings just one line of a happy little love-song (l. 187). Then Ophelia passes out of the presence of the King and the Queen and the rest, the last utterance that we hear from her being a prayer for the mercy of God upon her father's soul and upon the souls of all the Christian dead. We are never to see Ophelia again.

It only remains that we be informed of her death as in the next scene but one. The picturesqueness of the passage in which it is announced **Sc. vii.** may cause it to serve well as material for treatment by Millais in a picture full of imaginative suggestion as well as of detailed nature-study; but such descriptive value as the passage possesses cannot hide from us its perfect absurdity. The first impulse of Laertes is, naturally enough, to run to the spot where Ophelia's body lies; so his

inquiry has reference only to the precise locality: but the information given him comprises everything but that. He is offered a vague and general description of landscape, the silvery greyness of the willow's leaves being noted, and the glassy stillness of the water that reflects them: he is given in detail the composition of Ophelia's floral garlands, with a brief excursus upon the two names by which one of the wild orchids is popularly known. He is told that his sister was seen to clamber into the willow, upon a branch which broke, out of mere spitefulness says the Queen (l. 174); so she fell thence into the stream, whose moistness Her Majesty attributes to its tears of sympathy. There, he is informed, they watched her float a while, and heard her sing 'melodiously' some 'snatches of song': at last they saw her sink, down to the 'muddy' bottom of the 'glassy'-surfaced stream: Ophelia was drowned! Laertes might well inquire who the witnesses were. Horatio was responsible for Ophelia's safe-keeping (ii. 75): was it then he that saw and heard all this? No, nor anyone else. The whole passage is absurd, and as undramatic as it could be, if it is regarded as the account of the actual death of Ophelia. Is the passage, then, to be treated as a blot upon the play, as an example, unique in HAMLET, of the dramatist's forgetting the dramatic in his interest in description? No such theory can for a moment be entertained by the intelligent reader until a

rational explanation of the difficulty has been sought in vain. And not in vain will rational explanation be sought. Let the passage be considered afresh and in its true setting.

When Laertes broke down the door and forced his way in, Gertrude, though her husband tried to impart to her of his customary self-possession, was naturally in terror. It was in vain that she besought Laertes to be 'calm.' 'Where is my father?' was his demand. 'Dead,' replied Claudius. 'But not by his hand,' interjected the terrified Queen, feeling that her husband was in mortal danger.¹ More tragedy has occurred since then in the Polonius family: there is another death to announce. Now suppose she comes in and says, 'Laertes, your sister's drowned,' she must expect to have to answer an excited inquiry as to how it occurred. If she gives the true reply, 'Nobody knows,'² why then, Laertes may break out into an awful fit of passion, and cry: 'How came she dead? I'll not be juggled with! To

¹ Soon after, she went out. The stage-direction (at IV. v. 200) should (I am sure) read 'Exit Ophelia followed by Queen.'

² The coroner, it is true, afterwards decided at the inquest (V. i. 4-5) that the death was to be regarded as accidental; but as there were no witnesses (had there been any the Queen would at least have apologised for their inaction), the populace arrived at a conclusion quite inconsistent with the Queen's account, namely, that Ophelia had committed suicide (V. i. 1-2); and the clergy independently arrived at a similar conclusion (V. i. 262-4), admitting indeed that it was somewhat 'doubtful' (l. 250), but sure that they were justified in depriving her of the benefit of the doubt. Gertrude's story is clearly fictitious.

hell, allegiance !' and so forth, as before. Then her life or her husband's will be positively in danger again. So she has resolved that at the moment of informing Laertes of the sad event she must urge that it was purely accidental, while to lessen the bitterness of it she will assure him that the death was painless, Ophelia's mind having too far gone for her to feel 'her own distress.' With this view, she has made up a story which in its every phrase shows signs of having been carefully prepared—a story full of circumstance and detail—to give to Laertes in reply to his expected inquiry about the manner of Ophelia's death. So as soon as he speaks, she tells him her story, leaving unanswered his question because it happens to be not 'Oh, how?' but 'Oh, where?' For Gertrude is awkwardly unimaginative, as has been seen before.¹ Lacking refined sensibility herself, she cannot well enter into the feelings of others. That is why she has expected Laertes, dangerously angry about his father's death, to be dangerously angry likewise upon hearing of his sister's death; whereas the uppermost feeling of Laertes is naturally enough one of poignant grief. He was expected to demand immediately a full explanation; whereas his first inquiry is as to the spot where the event occurred, his first impulse being (naturally enough) to hasten thither.²

¹ In Act I. Sc. ii.

² Gertrude's fear of Laertes comes out once more in the remarkable message that she sends to Hamlet in V. ii. 216. Her fear proved to be well grounded.

Thus explained, the Queen's description of the drowning comes to be of a piece with all the rest of the play: once the temper of the speaker has been apprehended, the words are seen to be in perfect accord with that temper: that is to say, the passage is perfectly dramatic. And, thus explained, it affords one more illustration to show how little effort this dramatist makes to secure a proper stage effect, or how distinct dramatic value is from theatrical value to his mind.¹

The other contents of this closing scene of Act IV have yet to be referred to. Claudius, having exculpated himself from Laertes' charge of befriending Hamlet, by proving (ll. 1-5) that Hamlet was on the contrary his mortal foe, still feels nervous about revealing to Laertes the meaning of the English voyage. Besides being unable to tell how Laertes would regard his plan, he has no evidence of it at present to adduce. So he must try to put Laertes off (ll. 33-5). 'You shortly shall hear more': 'I' loved your father as a personal friend, and 'we' are careful for 'our' kingly 'self': Hamlet has been your father's enemy and mine: so try and 'imagine'—. But at this very critical point Hamlet comes to the king's aid. His folly in writing to announce his return is in keeping with all the other fatuous errors of commission and omission in relation to Claudius which characterise his descent. Claudius is thus

¹ See p. 58 and references thence.

enabled to suggest treachery and assassination to Laertes, whom he finds a ready hearer: he could give him a recipe for poisoning, having some experience in that art, but Laertes has already thought of poisoning and has secured some 'venom' elsewhere. Hamlet's writing to Claudius has decided the character of the catastrophe, and has enabled the assassins to mature their plans.¹

Claudius, to ensure immediate action on the part of Laertes, has recourse to an interesting argument about the dangers of delay. The passion of love, he argues, diminishes in intensity with the lapse of time since the sense-experiences in which it originated and was sustained. Now that passion in this case directs to a strenuous action; therefore the action should be undertaken before sufficient time has elapsed to diminish greatly the intensity of the recurring emotional experiences. 'What we would do,' he says—with special reference to this argument which he has left incomplete—'we should do when' the purpose based upon the passion is yet strong; for if the intention is diverted by circumstances, then the sense that the thing 'ought to' be done becomes but a 'sigh' of regret, which has the twofold effect of easing and demoralising.²

¹ Hamlet added a postscript (l. 54) to his letter, in precisely the same spirit as that in which he inserted the numerous addenda in his discourse in Act III, Sc. iv. See pp. 176-9.

² All thoughts and feelings seek to materialise, to externalise themselves. [That is the most fundamental fact of the universe,

Is there one point in which as dramatist Shakespeare fails? Does he sometimes attribute to a character the utterance of thoughts too philosophical, too profound, for the character as judged by all other data that he has given us to judge by? Does this matchless intellect sometimes fail to see how many are the grades of our inferior intelligence, so that, while he treats the illiterate as mostly fools, he may in the course of a play attribute to a man of superior position some remark (probably the enunciation of a general principle) expressing a thought which to the dramatist seems, like all other thoughts, quite simple, but to which the person in question could not properly attain? If so, the argument before us¹ seems to be a case in point.

the reason for all action, the basis of all art.] Any externalising of feelings tends to 'ease'; which partially explains such phenomena as kissing, cursing, weeping, sighing; or, to take an example remote in character from these, auricular confession in that aspect of it which engages Bacon's attention in the passage I have quoted, *ante*, p. 154 *n.*; or, for another example, see *MACBETH*, IV. iii. 208-10. That is how the sighing of 'ought to' 'eases'; and it 'hurts' by rendering this idle mode of externalising the feeling a substitute for its materialising in a more strenuous action appropriate to it.

The only recent editor, so far as I have observed, who has ventured to restore from the original the unpronounceable words 'spendthrift's sigh' is Mr. E. K. Chambers (the 'Warwick' edition), the 's' having been generally dropped by editors though the insertion of an extra *s* in the original was an unlikely sort of misprint. The point is that the procrastinator squanders time even as the spendthrift his estate; a point which is lost by the emended reading.

¹ I might adduce, as another simple example, the thought of Laertes in I. iii. 11-14.

Now this argument addressed to Laertes about the 'lapse of time and passion'¹ has for us an obvious applicability to the case of Hamlet. And it bears a marked resemblance to the argument in the sub-play.² If the player-king there made remarks that apply at least as well to Hamlet as to Gertrude or Baptista, it is because Hamlet wrote the passage, it is because the composition is that of the man who argued upon such lines in his soliloquies. But if Claudius's argument here presents a similar phenomenon, what is the explanation of this strange fact? Just that Shakespeare likes to see the tragedy's motive re-stated. It would be quite a mistake to say that Shakespeare is undramatically giving us, not Claudius's views about Laertes, but his own views about Hamlet: the argument is all right; it does apply to the case of Laertes:³ the only point is that the reason why the dramatist seizes an opportunity to represent the thoughts of Claudius as turning to this aspect of things is that he likes to have the moral situation, or rather one aspect of it, set forth afresh. The difference between Hamlet and Laertes with regard

¹ III. iv. 107.

² III. ii. 196-205.

³ There is also this to be said, that the discourse gives a grand opportunity for dramatic irony. Take, for example, ll. 128-9,

'No place, indeed, should murder sanctuarize;
Revenge should have no bounds';

and consider that the speaker is a murderer and that the question of avenging the murder upon him is the theme of the tragedy.

to this very point that Claudius dwells upon is a main motive: Hamlet might well describe himself as a 'foil' to Laertes, a foil whereby the 'fiery' brilliance of the man of action shall be 'set off.'¹

Incidentally, in the course of this dialogue, we are given to know that Hamlet has practised fencing, has rather fancied himself as a fencer if the King speaks true. We are to learn later² that he started practising at the time represented by the close of Act I. And the information adds substantially to our knowledge of Hamlet. For who can question—once it has been pointed out—the intimate relation subsisting between, on the one hand, Hamlet's suspicion, in Act I, Sc. ii, of foul play, or his knowledge, by Act I, Sc. v, of the form which it has taken, and, on the other hand, his desire to perfect himself in sword-practice? Fencing was an exercise more suited to Laertes' temperament³ than to Hamlet's, and that is why Horatio in V. ii. 219 says Hamlet will lose the wager; but Hamlet's reply is that his chances are good, as he has given himself 'continually' to this exercise of late.⁴ Shakespeare might have made out

¹ V. ii. 266–8.

² V. ii. 220.

³ Polonius classed it with 'drinking,' &c., among the vices of youth, II. i. 25.

⁴ Two months elapsed between Act I and Act II (see III. ii. 136). There is no other gap except that between Sc. iv and v of Act IV, where an indefinite but of course shorter interval occurs. Thus the 'two months since' of IV. vii. 82 takes one, as might be expected, to the interval between Act I and Acts II–III.

of Hamlet's resolve to perfect himself in sword-play a better excuse for procrastination than any that occurred to Hamlet's thoughts. But perhaps it is because it would have been an excuse of too practical a nature, for that unpractical mind, that Shakespeare has until now withheld this information of high character-value. When he does introduce this information he does so casually and without emphasis: he has no device such as the classical Chorus to interpret his work for us, and he never pauses to say to us, in an audible 'aside,' *Nota bene*. He just leaves us all to make fools of ourselves by interpreting his characters according to our own fancy instead of studying Shakespeare.

THE FIFTH ACT

‘THINGS are what they are, and the consequences of them will be what they will be.’ They are the subject-matter of the fifth act. ‘An end,’ said Aristotle,¹ ‘is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, but has nothing following it.’ The consequences are final. How, it might be asked, should this be so? Is not every phenomenon cause as well as effect, and the system of things an unending concatenation of these two? Yes, is the answer, there is a point of view from which the only true unity is the universe, which is so vast that none but God can comprehend it; but within the vast unity are innumerable lesser units; and the fact that not only a human life but a moment in human consciousness may be so disentangled from what goes before and after as to be seen to be a thing by itself, as to be seen to have entity and individuality, is that wherein consists the value of life and also of art: it is thus that a part of a life, or even a moment in consciousness, may form the subject-matter of a work of art, the theme of drama

¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*. See the passage in its setting, as already quoted, p. 24-5.

or lyric. If art does not impress one with a sense of completeness, that is to say of unity, then in the measure in which it does not is the art defective. It is because we are more likely to apprehend as a whole, to recognise the unity of, what is completed within twenty-four hours, than of what is spread over as many years, that dramatists concentrate the interest, in point of time, within narrow limits, some holding that the represented action should be such as need not extend beyond a day or two, and Shakespeare condensing the events of many years into an affair of weeks or months. That is the 'unity of time' in drama. The scope of 'Paradise Lost' is greater far than that of any other work of art, embracing as it does from eternity past to eternity to come: much of the work is occupied with the divine counsels, in Milton's Olympus, before time began: yet, from the point where the action commences in the first book with the consultation of the fallen angels to the point where it terminates in the last book with the expulsion from Eden, only a few days elapse. Thus the whole action represented is apprehended as a whole. Our immediate concern, however, is only with the ending of a work of art: it must be a true end. We do not speculate as to what is beyond the limits of a picture that we see, nor as to what happens after the close of the action represented in the play.

The fifth act of *HAMLET* opens with the grave-diggers' scene. The ancients were justified in

imposing artificial restraints, in the interest of art, upon their drama :¹ but if they said that a tragedy

must maintain a tone of high seriousness

Sc. i. uninterruptedly throughout, then they were wrong, just as, if they held that there must be no high seriousness at all about a comedy, they were wrong. Shakespeare would have been much at fault had he followed them in this. The inter-spersion of comedy through tragedy in life is the only justification required for the interspersing—in so far as it occurs—in the art that represents life; and the high seriousness of situations whose issue makes them belong to comedy is what raises the comedy of Shakespeare to a height that it is no exaggeration at all to describe as infinitely above the height attained in that department by the ancients.

The jesting is grim, in this discourse of comedy clowns engaged in the digging of Ophelia's grave. The dramatic effect is to introduce relief.² There are to that word 'relief' two meanings closely connected, though generally thought of as distinct. On the one hand, we speak of experiencing relief when a period of suspense has terminated through affairs somehow resuming their normal course : on the other hand we speak of things as being relieved by

¹ For the grounds of their justification, see pp. 28-38, especially 37-8.

² When Athenian tragedy was at its highest, Athenian instinct appears to have provided a rather clumsy equivalent for this Shakespearean relief; for the writer of tragedy had to compete for public honours with not only a trilogy of tragedies but also a satire, and the whole collection was to be performed consecutively, although the satire had no relation to the tragedies.

contrast, of what is bright, for instance as being thrown into relief by a sombre background. We may need to have both these senses before us when considering dramatic relief.

The tragedy of HAMLET is to have a stormy and bloody ending : the King, the Queen, the hero, and his assassin are to die together upon the stage. The language then will be language of high tragedy, befitting the high tension of the tragic interest. When the first scene of this act commences, the interest is at a very different, at a very much lower, level : so the grave-diggers' discourse is in prose. As the funeral comes in, the quality of the interest is to rise, so that the remainder of the scene will be in blank verse. But in the second scene, for the purpose of further relief, a prose passage of some length is to be introduced, after Hamlet has recounted his experiences upon the voyage ; and the function of that passage is to be to lower the level of interest, the discourse turning upon a matter ostensibly trivial : from that lower level the interest is to rise sharply to heights of tragic intensity as the end draws on.

There is mortality at the beginning as at the close of the act. There are many skulls around, and the grave-diggers sing at their labour.

For what we know must be and is as common
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,
Why should we in our peevish opposition
Take it to heart ? ¹

¹ I. ii. 98-101.

They do not take it to heart at all. 'Custom hath made it in' them 'a property of easiness.'¹ 'Death is common,' and if so, 'why seems' an Ophelia's death, or a Hamlet's, 'so particular to thee?'² The routine of the world's work is scarce disturbed thereby; and that routine the 'goodman delvers' represent.

These clowns have a philosophy. If not brilliant upon the subject of criminal law, they know at all events something about the Church's susceptibility to political and social influences. Indeed their philosophy goes deep enough to search the very foundations of society, and they can declare descent from Adam to be their patent of nobility. Their jests may hover grimly around the gallows and the grave, but they know something about life as well as death, and they are sane. Hamlet, entering, moralises, philosophises, according to his wont, while Horatio contributes to the conversation his usual 'Ay, my lord,' and 'No, my lord,' In the presence of death the leveller, Hamlet and the clowns meet upon a level; for as they discourse upon mortality the philosophy of the delvers is about as good as that of the philosopher. If 'most invectively he pierces through the body of the country, city, court,'³ disposing of the political schemer who 'would circumvent God,' of the courtier with his fulsome courtliness, of the lawyer

¹ V. i. 75.

² I. ii. 74-5.

³ AS YOU LIKE IT, II. i. 58-9.

with his 'tricks' and his legal jargon, it is but trite sermonising to declare that the plotting and the courtesy, actions at law and purchases of land, all terminate in death—or that 'the paths of glory lead but to the grave'¹—yet it is not much further that his philosophy carries him now.

Although Hamlet has been of late through interesting experiences, about which Horatio (however marked his lack of curiosity) may be supposed to be willing to hear, he is pre-occupied too much with life in general to advert just now to these: if there is introduced into his meditation anything in particular of his own past experiences, it will be because some circumstance causes recollection of the more distant days of childhood, as he affectionately recalls (ll. 202-12) poor Yorick the jester, who kissed him and carried him about and who died when he was seven years of age. As to the less distant past, with which he is not much concerned, it has to be said that he has not quite forgotten Ophelia: for he refers for the third time (ll. 213-15) to her face-painting. 'Get you,' he says, 'to her room' where she studies cosmetics, and privately quote to her the lines from my sonnet:

Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?²

See, he says, whether she will still simper then.

¹ Gray's *Elegy*.

² Sonnet cxlvi.

But it is not Ophelia personally that he is thinking of so much as womanhood in general as exemplified in her. The reference to her is only a degree more definite than the reminiscence of Claudius in the words about Cain the fratricide.¹ But while he is saying, 'Tell her that to this she must come,' that beyond the vanity of life is death, little does he know that Death has already laid his hand upon Ophelia, and that even now the body is on its way to the grave.

Even now there enters the funeral procession. The Church denies to Ophelia its burial service, and but that the Church's 'order' is 'o'erswayed' by royal 'command,' would refuse to allow the body to rest in the churchyard. 'What ceremony else? what ceremony else?' reiterates Laertes. Are there to be no prayers for the dead? Not, he hastens to add, that his sister is in much need of them; but the priest for his 'churlishness' will be. To think that it should come to this: at the father's funeral no armorial bearings—at the sister's no burial service! Impotent before that great and to his thinking cruel organisation the Church, he feels that he must himself do something: and what can he do? His helpless grief in presence of the cruelty of 'maimed rites,' driving him wild, impels him with a wild impulse to make up for the lack of ritual by embracing the corpse; and when he has

¹ Line 85. Cf. Claudius's reference to the curse of Cain upon him, III. iii. 37.

leapt into the grave his words and actions grow wilder.

But why, it must be inquired, should the ostentation of his grief put Hamlet into 'a towering passion' (ii. 80) thus? It cannot be because he feels Laertes to be insincere: he is not insincere this time. It is that the startling fact of Ophelia's death has struck anguish into Hamlet's heart, and has caused his mind to turn to the pleasantest aspect of his relations with her, so that he feels a deeper affection for her now than ever before, and that his love for her, differing in quality from a brother's love, seems to him to have been in quantity greater than that of many 'brothers.' He himself should be the chief mourner here, he feels. But mourning is best performed in quiet; grief is naturally silent. So the noisiness (the 'bravery' as Hamlet calls it,¹ meaning bravado or ostentation) of Laertes' grief enrages him: the wildness of Laertes' action combines with the nerve-strain resulting from the shock of Ophelia's death to induce in Hamlet a very 'antic disposition'; and he leaps into the grave, insanely.² Laertes, after

¹ V. ii. 79.

² A more striking instance of apparent insanity, in the action of one man, inducing real insanity in another, is to be found in the central scene of KING LEAR. It seems to me a strangely inadequate psychology which supposes a perfectly sane Hamlet to have deliberately resolved, upon this horribly unsuitable occasion and for no conceivable purpose, to 'feign' madness; and supposes him in his explanation to Laertes afterwards (ii. 243) to be prevaricating.

uttering one curse, says no more ; his astonishment at the appearing of his mortal foe being such that he does not speak again during the remainder of the scene. So Hamlet, full of scorn, departs ; and Claudius reminds Laertes that their plans are laid, interjecting for his benefit a reproof to Gertrude for not looking better after her son.¹

Now what took Hamlet into that cemetery to meditate ? We are not even afforded a soliloquy to inform us that he blames himself as
Sc. ii. before for ‘oblivion’ or inaction. And in fact he does not : he has on good grounds ceased to blame himself. In Act III, Sc. iv, when about to set out, unresisting, for England, he was confident that by some deep plot he would outwit his adversary : but in Act IV, Sc. iv, when actually setting out, he admitted to himself that he had no plot, that he was only drifting ; and he exhorted himself to develop ‘bloody thoughts.’ This he since has accomplished, a bloody thought enabling him to write a letter that will lead to the destruction, not indeed of Claudius—it would take more than the writing of a letter to do that—but of Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern, whose death, thus planned with deliberation, is about as much to the purpose as was that, at an earlier date, of Polonius, brought about without deliberation as the result of the ‘bloody thoughts’ that possessed him then.

¹ Compare the reproving ‘*your* son’ with ‘*our* son’ in ii. 298.

But it is of great interest to note the manner in which Hamlet regards the deliberateness with which he sent these two to their doom. In the first place, he treats it as if what he did was to write another 'play' (l. 31): his tendency to let the world of actuality fade into the world of thought could have no more marked exemplification than that: and in the course of narrating this deed—imaginatively attractive to him as being artistic, drama-like, but in actuality bloody enough—he digresses, callously one might say, to congratulate himself upon his penmanship. In the second place, he claims irresponsibility: for he says that the plan was involuntary as to its inception: that before he could interfere (ll. 30-1) his brains had started the work upon their own account.¹ In any case their death does not trouble his conscience

¹ This excuse is not exactly insincere. What he is feeling, put into the language of our very latest psychology, is that it was his 'sub-consciousness' that was at work while he deliberated, that is to say (to refer to the case of his previous 'play'), while he said 'hm' (II. ii. 617). He is trying to express the thought that although he was deliberating before he did the deed, yet the deed was more instinctive than volitional. It was done, as was the slaying of Polonius, owing to a homicidal impulse described in III. ii. 407 *sq.* Now, as then, 'be-netted round with villanies,' he felt that he must strike, must slay; and the lack of self-control which has become his settled habit since he culpably decided in Act I to let himself go leads him, now as then, to strike down the wrong man. When I wrote, as to Hamlet's first play (*ante*, p. 122), that 'the plan to write the play was not very far from being as instinctive, or spontaneous, as was the earlier thought of contributing a few lines to THE MURDER OF GONZAGO,' I was unaware that Hamlet himself had attempted to describe the writing of his second 'play' in this way.

(l. 58) any more than did that of Polonius; for 'their defeat,' like his, 'did by their own insinuation grow.'

He even attributes his action to the will of God. It 'pleased heaven,' he said,¹ that he should slay Polonius; 'heaven ordained,' he now says (l. 48), that he should slay Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. When thus attributing the death of Polonius to Providence, he could disclaim responsibility; and now that the last scene of the last act has come, he is so confident in the overruling hand of 'a divinity' (l. 10) that he repudiates all voluntary action. If he made any plans, they 'palled' (l. 9); in setting out for England, he made none; and behold, an accident brought him safely back to the place where he ought to be. There is therefore no such thing as chance; this was the intervention of Providence. So Hamlet held: was he right? A little later, the feeling came upon him that death was drawing near (ll. 222-35): but his trust was still in God; he relied upon the words, 'Not a sparrow shall fall to the ground without your Father.'² Was he right? No, is the answer, he was not right in either case. Here at the close of the tragedy the dramatist is making us face mysteries of destiny.

Some readers find it unsatisfactory that in the *dénouement* accident should play so important a part. What they find unsatisfactory is funda-

¹ III. iv. 173

² St. Matt. x. 29; referred to l. 231.

mental to the dramatist's philosophy. For Providence is indeed, as Hamlet thinks, asserting Itself in the solution of the Danish problem ; is asserting Itself through what men would call accident. And there is indeed ' a special providence in the fall ' of a Claudius, of a Gertrude, a Laertes, and a Hamlet. What was committed to Hamlet at the start as his duty to do it was his destiny in the end to accomplish : ' the time was out of joint ',¹ and he was going to ' set it right ' by ' quitting ' Claudius ' with his arm ' (l. 68). But why does accident play so important a part in Act V ?² Because Hamlet in Act I decided that it was to do so, when he decided to let himself go. Therein consisted his madness. And the reason why he was not justified in speaking of ' heaven ' as ' ordinant ' (l. 48) in the details of his procedure, nor in ' defying augury ' (l. 230) and calmly relying upon God when he felt death to be near, was that, when a man has a duty to do,³ to leave it undone and put his trust in God

¹ I. v. 189.

² For what is in my judgement a complete misunderstanding of the position of accident in the play, see Hegel, referred to by Mr. Bradley in his lecture on Hegel, in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*.

³ I beg readers to remember that while there is nothing easier for us than either to deny that Hamlet was responsible to kill Claudius out of hand, or to insist that obstacles unconnected with the hero's temperament were until this closing scene insuperable, such denial, and such insistence, are the repudiation of Shakespeare's postulates. Upon the two postulates, that Hamlet had a duty to do, and that there was no external obstacle such as our imagination would readily construct, the whole fabric of the plot depends : if we are prepared to ignore the tragedy's hypothesis, as some critics have done,

to bring things right will bring disaster. It is not that providential purpose will be thus frustrated, for accident may serve to its accomplishment, as in the case of Hamlet's pirate captors: it is that this attitude of mind means the relinquishment, on the individual's part, of freedom, responsibility, manhood. It was just after his first error of commission—his previous errors having been those of omission—it was just after the slaying of Polonius, that Hamlet first took refuge¹ in the sense of God's providence. And the pure chance of his return from the English voyage greatly strengthened his sense of the 'divinity that shapes our ends'; in the sense of which he attained peace of mind. The normal process is for the 'divinity's' plan to be worked out through the agency of free men: Hamlet was given a chance of doing his share in the working out of it deliberately; but he failed to take the chance. It still is his destiny to do his share before he dies; but the failure has already involved harm to others, and it is to involve his own doom.

Hamlet, then, has told Horatio of the letter that he wrote to the English king, which was leading two to a scarcely deserved doom. Every one of the five acts has now brought out Hamlet's aptitude

well and good; but then we ought to be re-writing the play, and not to be studying what Shakespeare wrote. If a further treatment of this subject is required, see Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, pp. 94-96.

¹ III. iv. 173.

for writing.¹ When on board ship, he composed this document for the English king; and when he got back to land his first thought was to write three letters home, one at least of which none but a madman would have written. Now Horatio has heard the story of the treachery of Claudius: does he not think (ll. 63-7) that it is Hamlet's duty to kill him? But Horatio cannot answer Yes; and he says instead that the news of the envoys' death will soon arrive. Yes, soon, says Hamlet; 'and the interim is mine!' He must take action now without delay, even though he have no friend to aid him: for the time is short.

Now, just when he has reached this point, there comes the suggestion,—through the 'courtier which could say "Good morrow, sweet lord! How dost thou, sweet lord?"'²—that Hamlet should amuse King Claudius and help him to win a wager. If his lordship is quite at leisure? And he declares that he is: he has nothing to do just now (l. 181); he will win for Claudius if he can (ll. 183-4); his 'purposes follow the king's pleasure' (ll. 208-9). At last Hamlet seemed to be bracing himself to action—in 'the interim is mine'—but a trifling interruption has enabled him to let himself go again. So the end is drawing near. For there must be some

¹ Act I, the notes in his commonplace-book; Act II, the letter to Ophelia and the twelve or sixteen lines that he would add to a play; Act III, the play; Act IV, three letters to his friends; Act V, the commission to the English king.

² V, i. 90-2.

limit to Fate's patient waiting upon the hero's leisure for the accomplishing of its stern behest. Hamlet has no sooner expressed his sense that he must hasten than he is deflected by the trifling proposal for a trial of skill with Laertes. 'The interim is mine'—but he is letting it go by. He has a presentiment that death is near; but he is ready. He says, 'What is it to die early?' He says, 'Let be' (ll. 234-5).¹ Providence, however, is not without plans, and will not let him die until through him some measure of rough justice has been executed upon more than one. 'Heaven' it shall have 'pleased' so 'to punish him by these, and these by him':² 'tis he must be their scourge and minister.' Though he have lived, he shall not die, wholly ineffective: he shall accomplish his life's work just as he passes hence into the other world, but clumsily, and at the cost of his mother's life and of his own.

Laertes is 'an absolute gentleman' (l. 111), the very 'chart of gentility,' 'full' (like his father) 'of most excellent differences'; so he 'receives like love the offered love' of Hamlet (l. 262); but, being a man of 'honour' (ll. 257, 259), he must 'keep his name ungored.' Laertes a gentleman, a man of honour: Laertes the assassin?

As for Claudius, the end shall be as the beginning: 'and as he drains his draughts of rhenish down, the kettle-drum and trumpet will bray out the triumph

¹ These words are omitted by some editors, ² III. iv. 173-5.

of his pledge.'¹ The first time that he came before us, he was going to drink to Hamlet's health,² a custom of his that Hamlet thought would be more honoured by its breach than by observance :³ and the last time that he comes before us he is going to drink to Hamlet's health again.

Laertes was penitent before he died. It is true that at one petition in his last prayer Shakespeare must have laughed ; for how could Hamlet be responsible at the Judgment Day for the poison bought by Laertes of his Parisian mountebank ? The dying man did not quite clearly apprehend the situation ! But the main point is that he did repent, while Claudius of course did not, having had his chance and missed it in the central act.⁴ There was some kindness or benignity, some tinge of a charity like God's, intermingled with sarcasm or grim irony, and some sort of pitilessness like Nature's, in the dramatist's great heart ; for he was glad to convert his villains if he could ere they should die. The obliquity of Laertes could not for a moment be compared with the deep-dyed infamy of the conduct of Edmund in *KING LEAR* ; yet even to so monstrous a criminal as Edmund he granted the grace of a deathbed repentance of a sort.

If in much time hitherto Hamlet accomplished little, in his last half-hour he will make up for that.

¹ Cf. lines 278-89 with I. iv. 10-12.

² I. ii. 125-8.

³ I. iv. 15-16.

⁴ III, iii.

When he knew (ll. 71-4) that the 'interim' for action would be 'short,' for a moment he felt braced to action by that knowledge—but for a moment only. Now, however, that his 'interim' is reduced (l. 326) to half an hour, he speeds, on wings whose beat is different far from that of the wings of his meditation,¹ to his enjoined and predestined revenge. His purpose, re-born with a 'violent birth' (to recall his own words in the sub-play²) would prove, if given time, of 'poor validity'; but it is not to be given time. And into this half-hour how much else is crowded too!

Some have oddly thought that the promptitude which now characterises him is similar to that which was to be seen on previous occasions, as when he thrust Polonius through, or boarded the pirate ship all alone, or grappled with Laertes in the grave. But the comparison should be one of pure contrast. Those sudden acts were the outcome of mere impulse, and were insane enough; these his last acts are such as reason and virtue would commend, and have all the characteristics of action that is deliberate. They are certainly to be called deliberate, but the strictly limited time compresses deliberation into a short space, thus saving it from evaporating into meditation. To procrastinate further is impossible, as there is

¹ But criticism seems weak in what may be called elementary philosophy; for it will be remembered that the words 'as swift as meditation' in Act I, Sc. v, have been universally taken as signifying speed instead of the exact reverse.

² III, ii, 198-9.

no *cras*, no morrow, now. He cannot let himself go, according to his wont; because there is no time. So in this supreme moment the normal consciousness of Hamlet is displaced, one might say, by what is normally subliminal. It is not exactly that here we have for the first time Hamlet as he somehow might have been all along; for nothing but a crisis of this particular character could release this energy welling up from a source that must under ordinary circumstances have remained untapped. We might say that it is a part of his true nature that is now for the first time appearing; but then we must add that no circumstances save such abnormal ones as these could bring it out. For actions along the lines prescribed by habit become automatic:¹ the habit of Hamlet is that of the life contemplative: and although this contemplative 'automaton' is not the whole of Hamlet, seeing that he has at least been able to 'externalize it' and 'anathematize it'² in soliloquy, yet it is the side of him which has 'assumed nearly exclusive control.'³ Thus the source from which Hamlet is now drawing supplies of intellectual energy is one that

¹ I use the terms 'automatic' and 'automaton' as they are used by G. T. Ladd in the chapter on 'The Consciousness of Identity' in his *Philosophy of Mind*, and not in that very different sense in which they are used by Myers in his treatment of the 'subliminal.'

² Ladd, p. 171; cf. Hamlet II. ii. 611 *sq.*

³ Not but that the contemplation might result in activity of great worth; but it would differ in kind from this. See pp. 119 *n.*, 240.

would normally (owing to this almost exclusive control of the contemplative) be kept hidden in sub-consciousness.¹

Hamlet prays for the forgiveness of his murderer : he says farewell to his mother who lies dead. That he himself is dying he can scarcely regret : for the ' world,' he finds time to say, is ' harsh,' and death ' felicity ' (ll. 358-9). But there is much to do. He has to make plans for the recording correctly of the history of his day : and, dying under the imputation (l. 334) of ' treason,' he has to think (l. 355) of his ' wounded name ' : if he has caused the destruction of many, he has at least to save Horatio from death : King for a half-hour, he is sorry that he cannot give audience to ambassadors : but, solicitous for the future of his country, he makes plans for the succession to the throne. Thus the Prince of Denmark dies. ' The rest is Silence.'

Silence has enwrapped the ' noble heart ' : but there is barely time for Horatio to utter a brief prayer for the repose of his soul, for the restful ministrations of angelic harmony. Silence might befit the situation, but there is no silence in the outer world—much noise instead. For the passing

¹ James writes of ' the group of ideas to which a man devotes himself, and from which he works,' which we may call ' the habitual centre of his personal ennergies,' other groups becoming ' peripheral in his consciousness ' ; but from so being these may become ' central ' (and the habitually central group peripheral), quite suddenly, as the result of an ' emotional crisis ' ; the only condition being ' a strong enough excitement.' (*The Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 196, 262).

of his soul, no church bell will toll : the firing of unconcerned guns, the beat of unconcerned drums, is heard, and the tramp of armed men. Fortinbras marches in, and then—

O proud Death,
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
That thou so many princes at a shot
So bloodily hast struck !

Horatio will ' speak to the yet unknowing world how these things came about.' In this dire scene of slaughter, as in every other scene, he keeps collected, self-possessed. He did for a moment feel as though this cataclysm were the end of all things. During the fencing, during the poisoning and the stabbing, he had said scarce a word, for what should he say ? But, overwhelmed by the horror, he suddenly resolved to play the part that ' an antique Roman ' in his self-possession would in such circumstances have played : he would take poison and die. From that, the love of Hamlet (l. 357) preserved him ; and now he will be able ' truly ' to ' deliver ' (l. 397), and calmly, all that has occurred.

Horatio was a remarkable man.¹ A poor scholar of Wittenberg, ' good spirits ' his only income,² he had impressed the Prince his ' fellow-student ' ³ as a ' just man,' going through the trials of his life of poverty with equanimity.⁴ He returned to

¹ A first note upon this character will be found p. 154.

² III. ii. 63.

³ I. ii. 177 ; and III. ii. 59-60.

⁴ III. ii. 70-3.

Denmark for the functions at Elsinore,¹ where he was respected as a scholar,² and speedily got to know court gossip,³ though himself a stranger in the courtly circle.⁴ In the royal presence he did not appear until the occasion of the sub-play; but Hamlet had previously⁵ told him of the alleged murder. After the sub-play, he jested⁶ with Hamlet for a little while, then stood by in silence, and shortly went out, leaving the Prince to take such steps as might seem good to him in view of the fact that now they both knew their king to be a murderer. When next we saw him, he was more definitely attached to the Court of Claudius.⁷ In unthinking fidelity both to him and to the Prince, he conveyed to him Hamlet's mad letter⁸; and the King committed to his care⁹ poor Ophelia, whom, however, he did not 'follow close' as he was bid; so she came to a bad end. Present by chance at her funeral, he said not a word; and it would be vain to guess what were his thoughts. As Hamlet's confidant he had come there in his company: but when Hamlet, after the insane tussle, went away, he let him go, following afterwards only because Claudius had told him to do so. His imperturbable calm was getting on Hamlet's nerves¹⁰ towards the end. But in one respect

¹ I. ii. 176-8.² I. i. 42.³ *Id.* 80 *sq.*⁴ I. iii. 7; V. i. 247; V. ii. 83.⁵ III. ii. 82.⁶ Upon the jesting, see p. 161 *n.*⁷ IV. v. 14-15.⁸ IV. vi.⁹ IV. v. 75.¹⁰ This I judge from V. ii. 2, 27, 36-7.

he was a help to Hamlet ; for he could let his lordship talk, could let him treat him as a friend : and in his self-possession he knew how to keep a secret of great import. He has stood for sanity and common sense ; he long since prudently recognised the case of his half-mad friend to be hopeless ; and he has remained on good terms to the last with King Claudius as well as Prince Hamlet. Intercourse with the Prince we may suppose to have meant for him something of spiritual growth ; for now that (l. 11) he is prepared to insist upon the certainty of the overruling hand of God, he is probably at a different stage from that in which he supposed that the knowledge of what is going to take place in the future may prevent its taking place.¹ And he rises high, very high, in his ' Good night, sweet Prince.' But nothing else about Horatio was so remarkable as the influence which he was able to exercise, not upon Hamlet, but upon posterity ; for the character attributed to him by one commentator after another is not exactly that which Shakespeare gave him.

One's conceptions of Shakespeare's characters are far too liable to be affected by one's being unaware how great is the amount of material, sometimes negative as well as positive, which Shakespeare supplies, to form the basis of one's judgement, even in the case of a person of minor importance. An impression of a character may so well be of

¹ I. i. 134.

the same order as that which one might get from a stage representation, and thus may differ from a deliberate judgment based upon study and reflection, because the persons in Shakespearean drama are true to life, and in life one's impression of a character, based upon actions seen, may differ from the deliberate judgment afterwards formed by reflection upon actions in their bearings.

Hamlet is gone: 'unhousel'd, disappointed, unaneled,'¹ he has died: and the great master of the ceremonies will see that he have a proper funeral. Opportunely he has brought in the Prince of Norway, conqueror of Poland, and the British Embassy as well, to attend it. As for Fortinbras, he expresses 'sorrow' (l. 399) for the sad events that have occurred, and makes them all turn to his own advantage. His fate it is to pass from one triumph to another, and he takes up the sovereignty of Denmark. In the crisis through which he so unexpectedly gets what he wanted, he behaves in a dignified manner, and he makes very proper and gracious reference to the late Prince Hamlet. He says he shall have a soldier's funeral, because 'he was likely,' if 'put' to the test, to have made an excellent king. Ha, ha! But whence this unseemly mocking in the presence of the dead? In the tragedy of 'woe and wonder,' in the 'dismal sight'

¹ I. v. 77. *Unhousel'd* = without Holy Communion; *disappointed* = without Absolution; *unaneled* = without Extreme Unction.

of slaughter, who dares to utter a sardonic laugh? Our master of the ceremonies it is: one Shakespeare by name. May it please Your Majesty King Strong-in-the-arm, he cannot keep from laughing at inappropriate times: when Ophelia deplored the hero's loss of reason he was poking fun at Ophelia, and when you deplore the hero's death he is poking fun at you.

Is Hamlet to have a soldier's funeral? There was a man whom he buried under a staircase: there was a woman he sent to a watery grave: two men he condemned to be executed in England: grounds for awarding military honours, these? No, but there is a pretty sight before us, just such a sight, says the warrior (ll. 412-13), as one would wish to see on Polish 'battlefield,' though here in the hall it does appear 'amiss.' He who has afforded 'proud Death' such a 'festival' may well be buried with 'soldiers' music and the rites of war.' Yet our hero was not a soldier: military music he designated a 'bray': Hamlet (strange paradox, but true) was a man of peace.

And was he 'likely, had he been put on' the throne, 'to have proved most royally'? Akhnaton, king of Egypt,¹ was a good man, and his subjects, doubtless, thought him mad. If when he came to the throne there was 'something rotten in the state of' Egypt, things were much worse by the time he died. So would it have been in Denmark under

¹ See p. 78.

the rule of the philosopher. 'My mind to me a kingdom is,' said Hamlet¹: give to the idealist a kingdom of no other sort than that.

Yet under happier circumstances what might he not have done and been? Uncommon, distinguished, he was bound to make his mark; and under the stress of exceptionally unpleasant circumstances he made it in an undesirable way. But he might have been a poet and a philosopher, a teacher of men.

Alas for the woeful thing,
That a poet true and friend of man
In desperate days of bale and ban
Must be son and heir to a king!²

As to what he might have done as poet and philosopher, Shakespeare, it may be remarked, has made it clear that in drama he could not have excelled, and this for two reasons: first, because, lacking dramatic sympathy, he would have put himself into his drama,³ just as Byron put Childe Harold into 'Manfred'; and, secondly, because he would have kept to the Senecan and academic lines to which Shakespeare and the great men were opposed. But other work he might have done better. Burton, in writing 'The Anatomy of Melancholy,' was engaged at what was exceedingly

¹ Hamlet said it in prose, II. ii. 261; my verse quotation is from Shakespeare's contemporary, Sir Edward Dyer.

² Adapted from Rossetti: I have only altered the last line, which should read, 'Must needs be born a king.'

³ See pp. 155-7.

difficult, and he might have welcomed the collaboration of one whose contributions might have proved undistinguishable from his own.¹ But even more solid work might have been accomplished by Hamlet as a teacher in philosophy and religion.² Nor would his lack of mental balance have seriously hindered this.

Fortinbras has graciously done the best he could. Of aught higher than sovereignty he knew not ; and he has hazarded the attribution of the highest qualities with which he is acquainted to the late lamented Prince of Denmark, whom he never had the advantage of meeting. But how much would

¹ For a further note upon this point, see Appendix E.

² 'Religious leaders have been invariably creatures of exalted emotional sensibility. Often they have led a discordant inner life, and had melancholy during a part of their career. They have known no measure, being liable to obsessions and fixed ideas ; and frequently they have heard voices, seen visions, and presented all sorts of peculiarities which are ordinarily classed as pathological.' (W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, pp. 6-7.)

'In the psychopathic temperament we have the emotionality which is the *sine qua non* of moral perception ; we have the intensity and tendency to emphasis which are the essence of practical moral vigour ; and we have the love of metaphysics and mysticism which carry one's interests beyond the surface of the sensible world. What, then, is more natural than that this temperament should introduce one to . . . corners of the universe which your robust Philistine type of nervous system . . . would be sure to hide forever from its self-satisfied possessors ?' (*Ibid.* p. 25.)

'Borderland insanity . . . has certain peculiarities . . . which, when combined with a superior quality of intellect in an individual, make it more probable that he will make his mark and affect his age than if his temperament were less neurotic.' (*ibid.* pp. 22-3).

it not have added to the mirth of Shakespeare to know that after many generations of commentator-ship critics of intelligence and repute would in the twentieth century take the words of Fortinbras, just as they have taken the words of Ophelia, as the expression of the dramatist's own opinion of his hero; and all because the 'wings' of their commentatorship are too 'swift' for 'meditation'!¹

When the soldiers' music has ended, then, solemnly hushed before the catafalques and thrilled with awe, the new King and the British Embassy and all the 'yet unknowing world' of Denmark, shall hear how that the late King was a murderer, the late Queen an adulteress, the favourite young courtier an assassin: this and much else Horatio will proceed 'truly' to 'deliver' and explain.

At one point he will fail. They never will be able to understand what manner of man was Hamlet. A puzzle in his life, he will remain a puzzle to them now that he is dead. About him, on to a future distant far, chatterers may chat and fools may vent their folly: about him the wise may utter words of wisdom: nevertheless, even Shakespeare himself—and, though he might attempt it, Hamlet also—would be unable to analyse completely the mystery of his personality. Much less shall we, readers and commentators, with all the plummets of our mediocrity, find ourselves able to measure those great depths.

¹ I. v. 29-30.

It is in some sense with the text of Shakespeare as it is with the text of the Bible. If we, each of us, in unlimited exercise of private judgment, bring to the text what we think we might reasonably hope to draw out of it, we then, thoughtfully reading between the lines, shall be sure to discover the text to contain that we expected. Nor is there any Academy that with an air of authority will issue pronouncements *ex cathedra* to decide with finality the real content and the right interpretation of Shakespeare. It is thus that it comes about that the text still supplies plenty of food for the mind, yea, lighter fare for the young and strong meat for the strong; still copiously purveys for the refreshment of the inner man milk and honey and red wine from age to age. The text is unexhausted; its content is vast: for just one thing more immeasurable there is than the heart of Hamlet, and that is the heart of his creator, Shakespeare.

APPENDIX.

A.

ON SHAKESPEARE'S FORMAL PLOT-STRUCTURE, AND ON THE DIVISION OF ACTS IN HAMLET.

(See *pp.* 20-7.)

I HAVE referred to the formalism of Shakespeare's plot-structure as seen especially in his frequent determination to secure for a plot a mathematical centre. There are plays in which nothing of the kind is to be found; but I hold that there is a moral centre of the plot deliberately placed in the central scene or scenes of the central act, in JULIUS CÆSAR and CORIOLANUS, in MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING, in MACBETH, KING LEAR, and OTHELLO, in THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR, THE MERCHANT OF VENICE and THE WINTER'S TALE, and finally in HAMLET. This list by no means exhausts the number of the plays so constructed; but ten examples will suffice. In the case of HAMLET, the issue is obscured by the fact that the accepted division of the acts is unauthoritative and indefensible. I take first some of the other cases, stating in each instance what the authority is for the accepted division of acts. Moulton ('Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist') was the first to propound this theory of a dramatic centre coinciding

with the centre of Act III, but in several instances I have arrived at results which differ from his. My references to his work are to the third edition (Oxford, 1897).

I. JULIUS CÆSAR.—There are no quartos. The folio text, while it gives the acts, omits the scene-divisions, although the play is exceptionally well printed. Had the scene-divisions been indicated, they would have had to correspond with those in our modern editions except in one instance in Act IV.

As Act III contains three scenes, the central one is Sc. ii. The plot contains a moral centre or turning-point, which is likewise Act III, Sc. ii. For, if we consider the cause of Cæsar's enemies, we see them to have been wholly successful from the beginning up to the occasion of the funeral orations—up to the point, in fact, where Brutus stops speaking and Antony begins: whereas from that point their fortunes are to wane until they are all destroyed in the catastrophe. Or, if we consider the cause of Julius Cæsar, what we observe is this: Cæsar, living, has been deliberately represented as ineffective, in episodes manipulated to show the great man to have the weaknesses of lesser men; and now not only has he died, but Rome seems ready to approve the manner of his death, so that (even though there has been at the close of the death-scene a suggestion of coming change) his fortunes are at their lowest at the beginning of the funeral orations. During the orations occurs the turning-point: henceforward his fortunes are to rise until his ultimate triumph in the catastrophe. The man, comparatively ineffective, has been conquered and is dead; but his spirit, supremely effective, is a living force unconquerable.

Moulton finds the turning-point in Sc. i: he says that when the servant of Octavius enters (l. 276) 'the reaction has begun.' I submit that ii. 39, 54-58, 71-76, are evidence that the reaction has not yet begun.

II. CORIOLANUS.—There are no quartos. The folio text gives the acts but not the scenes, the divisions of which would, however, correspond with our modern divisions throughout. Act III comprising three scenes, the central one is Sc. ii.

The plot contains a definite moral centre, which is likewise Act III, Sc. ii. For the dominant motive is this: the hero's sublimely egoistic will, apparently absolute and not to be influenced by any external force, is in reality amenable to a woman's wishes, to such a degree as to have its course thereby reversed at critical times and in spite of the hero's knowing the reversal to involve his doom. Nothing in Act V, Sc. iii, could hinder him from sacking Rome save his mother's influence; which thus proves the deciding factor in the catastrophe, being at the same time the cause of his preservation from the worst of crimes and the occasion of his dying as he does die. His mother's fateful influence, just hinted at in I. i, is only twice seen in exercise, the first occasion being in Act III, Sc. ii, where her victory foreshadows the greater victory of Act V, Sc. iii. It is the enunciation, at the very centre of Act III, of the motive, hinted at in the opening of Act I, which is to determine the catastrophe in Act V.

This play is not dealt with by Moulton.

III. MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.—The contents of the folio text are the same as those of the quarto: the folio gives the acts but not the

scenes, the divisions of which would, however, correspond with our modern divisions throughout. The centre of Act III is Sc. iii.

The plot contains a definite moral centre, or turning-point, which is likewise III. iii. The 'building of mischief'—threatened by Don John in Act I—upon the match between Claudio and Hero, is made possible by Borachio's plan divulged in Act II, of the successful accomplishment of which we learn in III. iii. Thereby the match is to be broken off, and Hero's reputation to be ruined, in Act IV. In that same scene, III. iii, Borachio is arrested by the Watch, as the result of which Don John is to be discomfited, Hero's reputation recovered, and the match confirmed, in Act V. Thus it is clear that the incidents of this scene constitute the moral centre.

This play is not dealt with by Moulton.

IV. MACBETH.—There are no quartos. The folio text gives the acts and scenes. The central scenes of Act III (the total number being six) are Sc. iii and iv.

The plot contains a definite moral centre or turning-point, which likewise occupies III. iii and iv. Throughout the first half of the play, Macbeth's career is one of steady and unbroken success. 'Supernaturally solicited' to the doing of a deed to which his own ambition inclines him, he appears to have Fate on his side, the decision of the King to visit him being only one of a series of favouring circumstances. The deed of blood having been successfully accomplished, Macbeth has been in due course (but not upon the stage) crowned King of Scotland: and we are to see him for the first time as King, entertaining all the nobles of Scotland, loyal to him even as they were to his predecessor.

At that very hour of his highest glory, the first signs of coming change occur : the murder of Banquo, planned only to secure that ' Banquo's issue ' shall not prevent Macbeth's son—if ever he have one (I. vii. 72)—succeeding to the throne, is a failure in that Fleance escapes : Macbeth having challenged Fate to ' come into the lists ' against him, Fate has done so. The King all but reveals his crime at the banquet, upon the break-up of which his first words to his wife express the assurance of coming retribution. From that point, everything steadily ' draws him on to his confusion,' to quote the words of the very next scene. The incidents which thus constitute the moral centre occupy the central scenes, Act III, Sc. iii and iv.

I have, however, to admit that the authenticity of Act III, Sc. v, is open to question ; and its excision would shift the centre. To judge of Sc. v by internal evidence, I should be disposed to say that the arguments against are stronger than those for its inclusion ; but if it be considered in relation to the formal structure of the plot as a whole, a different conclusion is reached ; for, occurring immediately after the moral centre, this witch scene occupies in relation to the second half of the play—in relation, that is to say, to the story of Macbeth's downfall—a position precisely analogous to that which the witch scene I. i occupies in relation to the first half of the play : in relation, that is to say, to the story of Macbeth's rise to power. If that scene, then, was not written *by* Shakespeare, I think that it was written *for* him, and that it is not an interpolation made in a later recension of the play. [See also my comparison, pp. 182–3, 188, of the structure of this play with that of HAMLET.]

Moulton finds the centre of MACBETH in Sc. iii taken by itself.

V. KING LEAR.—The folio text gives divisions of acts and scenes, differing from the quarto and from our composite text in certain points, but the differences do not affect Act III. The central scene of Act III is Sc. iv.

The plot contains a definite moral centre, which is likewise Act III, Sc. iv. The whole plot, on account of its unequalled complexity, is constructed upon a very formal plan. Act III in particular, containing some of the most difficult work ever attempted by a dramatist, is divided regularly. Sc. i having introduced the subject that is to occupy the act, the alternate scenes thereafter, ii, iv, vi, are concerned with Lear on the heath, and the others, iii, v, vii, with the doings in Gloucester's castle. There can be no need to labour the point that Act III, Sc. ii, iv, and vi, are morally central in relation to the plot: all, in respect of Lear, has, it is manifest, been leading up to this culmination, up to this great night of tempests. It is clear, too, that Sc. iv is the centre of all: here the madness of the forces of Nature—indicated by the direction, four times repeated in the folio, 'Storm still'—meets and coalesces with the madness of Lear, the madness of Edgar, and the madness of the Fool, whose comment is 'This cold night will turn us all to fools and madmen': and here, to meet all these, comes in Gloucester, 'almost mad himself,' as he says. 'What a night's this!' By Sc. vi, the storm has abated and Lear is under shelter: Act III, Sc. iv, is the centre of the tragedy.

Moulton's admirable analysis of the plot of this play brings out this point clearly.

VI. OTHELLO.—Our text is composite, the folio differing from the quarto. The quarto text

gives the acts and scenes, but with so many omissions that it is worthless as an authority; the folio gives them as we have them, save that it gives two scenes as against our three, to Act II, the difference being due not to any omission on the part of the folio, but to its making Sc. ii and Sc. iii. continuous; wherein it would appear to be in the wrong.

The central scenes of Act III are Sc. ii and iii. Sc. ii is peculiar, in its extreme brevity and its ineffectiveness. The passage has a function to fulfil, in that Iago in Sc. i went out in order to 'draw the Moor out of the way,' and here in Sc. ii we are satisfied that the Moor is safely out of the way and is in touch with Iago. But there is no authority for stage-directions as to place; and I submit that '*A room in the Castle*,' in the present instance, is wrong; and that this passage of six lines would be much more effective if it were made to represent nothing more than a walk across the stage—the place being outside the Castle—on the part of Othello and Iago; and if it were thus made continuous with Sc. i. *Exeunt* through a door Cassio, &c., then immediately enter Othello, &c., passing across the stage and *exeunt*. If this change be accepted, then Act III will have three scenes, our present Sc. iii, then to be entitled Sc. ii, being the central one. It is open to any critic to maintain that it is nothing but the desire to render our present Sc. iii central that has led me to suggest that our present Sc. ii is not wholly satisfactory as a scene by itself; but I think that the proposed change is an improvement even apart from the theory of a formal centre; and that nothing but the theory, generally satisfactory, that a scene must terminate when all the characters depart, would have caused i and ii to be separated. The folio division of scenes

was at fault once in Act II, as before noted, so why should it not be at fault once in Act III? It is not always necessary for a scene to terminate when all characters have left the stage: there are, for example, in *MACBETH*, Act V, two occasions upon which the stage is left empty for a moment without a change of scene.

The plot contains a definite moral centre, which is our Act III, Sc. iii, and which, according to the suggestion I have made, would be Act III, Sc. ii, and the central scene of Act III. All, from the commencement, has, in the planning of Iago, led up to this scene: it is what here occurs that changes the whole tenor of Othello's life, and sets him upon the course that will lead steadily to Desdemona's death, and his own.

Moulton felt 'the central turning-point' to be in this scene; but the evidence that he adduced was that in ll. 90-2 'the tide of Othello's love had reached its height, and here the ebb begins.' It cannot, I think, be admitted that there has been any such rise in Othello's love as is thus suggested: rather has it been at this height all along. Wherefore Mr. Bradley ('*Shakespearean Tragedy*,' pp. 54-5) regards the construction of *OTHELLO* as exceptional, saying that if we consider the play as dealing with the fortunes of Othello, 'the topmost point comes very early' (Act II, Sc. i) and 'is scarcely felt as a crisis at all'; whereas if we regard Iago as the leading figure, then 'the usual mode of construction is plainly abandoned, for there will nowhere be a crisis followed by a descending movement.' But I submit that the conception of the plot as consisting in the fortunes either of Othello or of Iago is defective: the fortunes in question (from the point of view of construction) are those of Iago's intriguing, which, touched upon as the tragedy's motive in

the opening scene of Act I, reaches a crisis in the central scene of Act III, and has its tragic outcome in the final scene of Act V. It is as the 'suggestion scene' that that central scene is the dramatic centre. The construction is in this respect quite normal, corresponding very closely with (for example) that of *CORIOLANUS*. But as Mr. Bradley, later on, in his interesting and masterly treatment of the plot (pp. 64-7), refers to a 'second half' as clearly commencing in (our) Act III, Sc. iii, the difference of view may not be great; my one point is that Shakespeare here, as usual, bisects the plot, placing the critical centre—towards which all from the outset proceeds, from which all to the outcome succeeds—in the central scene; so that the 'second half' commences in that scene.

VII. THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.—

The quarto text is very bad. The folio gives the divisions of acts and scenes. Act III comprises five scenes, the centre being therefore Sc. iii. The motive of the plot is the discomfiture of Falstaff; and the central scene of his degradation is that in which he is packed into the buck-basket—Act III, Sc. iii.

This play is not dealt with by Moulton.

VIII. THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.—The differences between the quarto and the folio text are very slight. The folio give the act-divisions, not the scene-divisions; but as to the scenes no question arises. Act III comprises five scenes, the centre being therefore Sc. iii. The title of the play is not Bassanio, but *THE MERCHANT OF VENICE*. The main dramatic motive is not the casket-choice, but Shylock's bond: the central

incident, the critical centre upon which all turns, is the arrest of Antonio—the subject of Act III, Sc. iii. The preceding scene is of far higher dramatic interest, considered by itself: but this one is the centre of the plot.

Moulton says the ‘dramatic centre is placed in the exact mechanical centre of the drama, covering the middle of the act’; he means, however, not Sc. iii but Sc. ii. ‘The true turning-point,’ he holds, ‘is the success of Bassanio.’ I submit that this Sc. ii (the climax admittedly of the caskets-story) needs to be linked with Sc. iv (Portia’s decision) to make of this the incident in which what Moulton calls the ‘complicating and resolving forces’ meet. It may be put thus: the plot’s centre is in the three central scenes, III. ii–iv taken together; but the central incident of all is in the centre of these, that is to say in Sc. iii. Round this incident as a centre the whole plot is constructed.

IX. THE WINTER’S TALE. — There is no quarto text. The folio gives the act- and scene-divisions. The central scene of Act III is Sc. ii. The theme of the play may be briefly stated thus:—Leontes suspects Hermione of being unfaithful to him (Act I). The result is Hermione’s public accusation and exculpation, followed by her supposed death and the penitence of Leontes (all crowded into Act III, Sc. ii). But after Leontes has long mourned his unworthy suspicion and his loss of her, it will be discovered that she is not really dead, and there will be reconciliation and ‘exultation’; all of which is reserved for the closing scene of Act V. From this it will be seen that the whole of the critical matter is put into the central scene: round it, as centre, the whole plot is constructed.

It is particularly noteworthy that the dramatist should have adhered to his formal plan in a play the structure of which is in other respects so loose—in a play in which he has been so regardless of dramatic propriety as to allow sixteen years to elapse between Act III and Act IV.

Moulton deals with the plot of this play in a footnote only (*op. cit.* pp. 352-3). Therein he finds a dramatic centre elsewhere; but I do not understand that footnote.

X. HAMLET.—The folio text, though differing from the quarto in important particulars, agrees with it scene for scene, in that additions and excisions in no case extend to a whole scene. The quarto does not give the scene- and act-divisions. The folio gives both up to Act II, Sc. ii, but neglects them thereafter. The act-division as we have it can be traced back to a players' quarto of 1676. As to the opening of Acts II and V, there is no question raised by any. As to the opening of Act III, Dowden ('Introduction' to Methuen's edition, p. xxii) says the division is here 'a matter of doubt,' on the ground that there exists a suggestion that our Act III, Sc. i, should be included within Act II. He does not himself express approval of the suggestion. Such a change would be quite indefensible. Act II is right as it stands. That it represents the events of one day (see i. 117), while Act III, Sc. i, opens on the next day (cf. II. ii. 560; III. i. 21), which with the night following extends throughout and beyond the limits of our Act III, is not of much value as an argument, for the division of acts does not necessarily correspond with gaps in time. That Ophelia figures prominently in just one scene in each act of the play, the series giving her life and death, so that such a change would crowd far too much of

her history into Act II and leave too little of it for Act III, is an argument that might not appeal to many. For weightier argument I refer readers to my treatment of Act II, where I hope its completeness as it stands will be clearly seen. But the suggestion to alter the division of Acts II-III is only a solitary suggestion, and has not been seriously taken up. Act III opens aright.

The opening of Act IV is in a very different case. So long ago as the eighteenth century the accepted division was here recognised—by Johnson—to be indefensible. For division at the end of our Act IV, Sc. ii, Sc. iii, or Sc. iv, defenders might be found. Once an accepted division exists, however, it is exceedingly awkward to make any change; for change would cause confusion respecting references to scenes whose numbering has been altered. That is why our modern texts keep to the indefensible division.

The only question with regard to the act-division in *HAMLET* is this: what are the contents of Act III and Act IV respectively according to the intention of Shakespeare? The answer involves a full study of the structure of the plot, and as that study forms an important part of the act-by-act study of the play, I discuss and answer this question in the body of my commentary on Act III (pp. 128-35, and see also 181-3, and 187-8). My contention is that Act III was to end with our Act IV, Sc. ii., Act IV commencing with our Act IV, Sc. iii, so that Act III, Sc. iii-iv, are the central scenes; and that the plot has a definite moral centre which is likewise Act III, Sc. iii-iv.

This play is not among those dealt with by Moulton.

B.

ON CATHARINE OF ARAGON.

(See pp. 54-5, 174-5.)

Hamlet, Claudius, and the Ghost concur in holding the union of Claudius and Gertrude to be incestuous (see I. ii. 157, III. iii. 55, I. v. 83, &c.). And Shakespeare took it for granted that his audience would be of the same opinion. So they would, for if it were not so Queen Elizabeth would have had little right to occupy the throne. Parliament, it is true, had decided that she was to be Queen, just as Parliament had decided that Mary was to be Queen; but the ground upon which the decision in the case of Elizabeth rested was that according to divine law a man may not marry his sister-in-law. It is necessary to explain the attitude of Shakespeare's generation, because at this distance of time it is natural to dwell upon the hardship occasioned to the noble Queen Catharine by the dissolution of her marriage. The story may be summarised as follows. (My authority for many details is A. F. Pollard's 'Henry VIII.')

Catharine was Henry's brother's widow. Her marriage to Henry was sanctioned by a dispensation granted by Pope Julius II., who, however, had first written that he did not 'well know if it were competent for the Pope to dispense in such a case.' Doubts remained, in the minds of many ecclesiastics, after the marriage. Henry appealed to Pope Clement to declare that his predecessor had acted *ultra vires*, and thus to annul the marriage. He wanted Anne Boleyn, but if that was all there was little difficulty, for it is clear that she became his concubine before she became his wife: what he

wanted most was to secure the succession by legitimate male issue. Now Clement would annul a marriage for much less cause than this, when required: for Henry's sister Margaret, Queen of Scotland, procured from him a divorce from her bad husband to enable her to marry a man with whom she was living in adultery; and Henry's sister Mary contracted a marriage which would have been bigamy but that Clement declared a previous papal dispensation insufficient and invalid. Yet Henry's difficulty was one that Clement could not solve: for being a prisoner in the hands of Catharine's nephew the Emperor he could not answer yes, and the break-up of Christendom might be involved in his answering no. So year after year went by, and still no answer could be obtained. The Pope, recognising the question to be political, was willing to facilitate Cardinal Campeggio's alternative plan for securing the succession, by offering a dispensation for a much worse case of marriage within prohibited degrees, namely, the marriage of Mary to her half-brother the illegitimate Duke of Richmond; but that was not wanted. As the Pope could not answer, the matter was referred to the clerics of the Universities, and with strange results; for eight universities of France and Italy, though papal (including the university of Laertes), pronounced in Henry's favour and against the papal dispensation, while Hamlet's university, which was Lutheran, held strongly with the papacy and against Henry. Finally the difficult matter was decided in England by the English for themselves, the marriage of Henry to Catharine being annulled by Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, who afterwards (it must be added) proved about as complaisant towards Henry as Pope Clement had been towards Henry's sisters; for there was nothing too hard for him to do, in

the way of marriage and divorce, to please his master, of the Church upon earth the Supreme Head.

All this happened long before the writing of *HAMLET*, and by that time the injustice done to Catharine could not but count for little in comparison with the interests of the national life: England's Elizabethan greatness was seen to have depended upon the national decision of the case of Catharine's marriage. And the decision in her case governed the case of Queen Gertrude of Denmark.

What follows is written tentatively, and not as expressing a settled conviction.

The author of *THE FAMOUS HISTORY OF HENRY VIII* was equally sensible of the pathos of Catharine's position and of the overwhelming necessity for Henry to take it upon himself to solve that knotty point of the marriage law which the papacy professed inability to solve, and for him to solve it, too, upon lines that agreed both with his own inclination and with the national interest. Therefore the author of that play made of Catharine one heroine and of Anne her rival another heroine; and he made of King Henry an unquestionable hero, the Tudor monarch standing for the interest of the nation against the rapacity of ministers and for the interest of the national Church against ecclesiastical tyranny. But he did not dwell upon the arguments for and against the validity of Catharine's marriage; and this for two reasons: first, that the public takes no interest in argument upon such questions, deciding them for itself either upon lines of sentiment or upon those of political predilections; second, that wherever Catharine is

present he wishes his public to be occupied with the pathos of her position and the hardship occasioned to her by the proceedings.

So near were the events set forth that they could not be looked upon with a historian's impartiality by many others than that dramatist himself, while as for him, so impartially did he sympathise with each of those engaged upon opposite sides in that dramatic conflict that he failed to dramatize it satisfactorily at all ; the procession of historical events that meant so much for England he made into what was more of a pageant than a play.

C.

ON THE 'DOZEN OR SIXTEEN LINES' OF II. II. 566-7, AND THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE SUB-PLAY IN III. II.

(See *pp.* 108-9, 117-24, 155-60.)

Criticism has hitherto limited itself to discussing which lines are the twelve or sixteen interpolated by Hamlet. Some commentators discover that one part or another of the sub-play differs in a marked degree from the rest, wherefore the part so differing is to be the part that Hamlet wrote. Some are clear that his lines are those commencing—

Thoughts black, hands apt, drugs fit, and time agreeing.

Others are equally clear that they are those commencing—

Purpose is but the slave to memory,
or—

I do believe you think what now you speak.

When Furness's 'Variorum' edition came out in 1877, there had recently been a discussion upon this point, started in the *Academy*, and carried on in the New Shakspeare Society's *Transactions*, where it occupied thirty pages. Furnivall, after summing up the controversy, had written: 'I hold very strongly that . . . the speech is not in the printed play,' and had suggested that the King's conscience may have been 'more quickly stung than Hamlet anticipated, so the written speech was never needed.' He imagined that the play contained 'startling inconsistencies,' for which reason he held that 'the inconsistency of Shakspeare's having made Hamlet first talk so much about inserting a speech, and then leaving it out after all, is what one might fairly expect.' The discussion was not yet at an end, and Ingleby informed Furness of the paper he was going to read, in which, dissenting from all that had been said before, he expressed the opinion that Shakespeare's real object was to convey 'the highest possible instruction in the art of elocution' in the words of Hamlet to the player at the commencement of III. ii, and that, that being 'the only dramatic need of the dozen or sixteen lines,' we have 'no further concern with them.' Furness, after giving the views of others, added:

It is to task the credulity of an audience too severely to represent the possibility of Hamlet's finding an old play exactly fitted to Claudius's crime. In order, therefore, to give an air of probability to what everyone would feel to be thus highly improbable, Shakespeare represents Hamlet as adapting an old play to his present needs by inserting in it some pointed lines. Not that such lines were actually inserted. . . . The discussion, therefore, that has risen over these 'dozen or sixteen lines' is a tribute to Shakespeare's consummate art.

Since this of Furness's appeared, I am not aware that any fresh views have been advanced. As against all these, what I hold is as follows.

The sub-play has not much further connection with 'The Murder of Gonzago' than that a murder is the theme of each of them. The dumbshow opens with *Enter a King and Queen*, the king with his crown on, and again, the tragedy proper opens with *Enter a King and Queen*. Why not *Enter Gonzago*, just as we have later on, *Enter Lucianus*? Because it is not Gonzago, it is not a 'duke' at all. The nameless king and queen are King Hamlet and Queen Gertrude. Hamlet wrote this play, to set forth, not 'the image of a murder done in Vienna,' but that of one done in Elsinore. What the plot deals with is his father's relations with his mother, and his father's death. He gave his little play a name, 'The Mouse-trap': but when he had gone a step too far by explaining to Claudius that it was a mouse-trap 'tropically,' or metaphorically, he then, playing with his victim, sought to divert him by declaring that it was not a 'king' and 'queen' that were here portrayed, but a 'duke' and his 'wife,' and that the duke's name was Gonzago—the name, as we are aware, in a play that he had been thinking about the day before. Again, at the moment when 'Lucianus' pours poison into the sleeper's ear, Hamlet repeats that the murder is done not for a 'crown' nor a 'kingdom,' but for the 'estate' of the duke 'Gonzago': he amuses himself by representing his dramatization of his father's death in its every circumstance as being a translation of something from the Italian. But when the king has gone out, Hamlet, speaking to Horatio, certainly claims the authorship of the play that has been performed: would it not be considered good enough, he asks, to get him a share in a company of actor-playwrights?

From the sub-play itself, I go back to the words of Hamlet to the players at the opening of the scene :

Speak the speech, I pray you, as I pronounced it to you, trippingly on the tongue ; but if you mouth it, as many of your players do, I had as lief the town crier spoke my lines.

This, it has been taken for granted, refers to twelve or sixteen lines in which alone Hamlet is, by hypothesis, interested. I hold that his words are addressed not to one player, but to the 'two or three' who according to the stage-direction are before him—are addressed, that is to say, to the players generally, and that they relate to the whole of the sub-play ; while at the same time 'the talk of the poisoning'—i.e., the speech of Lucianus—constitutes the only dramatic incident in the sub-play, and this short passage would therefore be the object of the special solicitude of Hamlet as playwright.

We have yet to deal with Hamlet's words, shortly after, to Horatio (ll. 80-92). 'One scene,' he says, is to 'come near the circumstance' of his father's death. Obviously, not one 'scene' in the technical sense, as there was to be no change of 'scene' in his little play : what he refers to is of course the scene of the king lying asleep and Lucianus administering the poison. Did you see, he will say to Horatio afterwards, how the king's guilt unkennelled itself 'upon the talk of the poisoning' ? (l. 300). One scene, and that the most important, the only one that he need speak of to Horatio, 'comes near the circumstance of his father's death' : what then about the rest of the play ? The rest sets forth, not his father's death, but his father's relations with his mother ; and even as he said nothing to Horatio about his feelings towards Ophelia, in the same way he would say nothing to him about his

feelings towards his mother : he had for some time past admired Horatio (III. ii. 68-70) ; but he made a confidant of him for the sole purpose of getting him to share the burden of what he knew and of what he was to do as to the murder of his father.

That is all that I have to say about the sub-play and the references to it in Act. III, Sc. ii. I submit that, even if one were to neglect the information derivable from the close of Act II, my position as to Hamlet's authorship would be reasonable. If the question were merely what it has hitherto appeared to be, a question whether Hamlet did or did not write this or that in fulfilment of his undertaking to the players to make some alteration in their play, the matter would not be of supreme interest to me. What makes the question one of first-rate importance is the bearing that my interpretation has upon the significance of Act II, Sc. ii. What really matters is that the usual interpretation mars a passage which is not excelled in psychological value by any passage in drama. Shakespeare is concerned to set forth in words, and more particularly through the soliloquies, the workings of Hamlet's mind. What we are to have before us in the present case is the process by which he arrives at the momentous decision which terminates the act. Criticism has spoiled it all by taking the decision, arrived at by l. 624, to write what will be 'something like the murder of his father,' and throwing it back to a point sixty lines earlier, where it has to occur quite suddenly and during conversation. The marvellous soliloquy fails of much of its purpose, so far as we are concerned, because all that Hamlet therein decides upon we believe him to have decided upon before. Nor is evidence lacking that some intelligent readers, accepting, as all have accepted, the usual view, have felt the passage to be anomalous—

out of keeping, to some extent, with what has preceded it. For Hunter (quoted by Furness) says that where we have 'About, my brain!' it should be 'About 't,' because Hamlet is telling his brain to set about composing lines previously decided upon. And with regard to the 'hum' that follows (in the quarto text), he comments thus :

This is evidently intended to be the first conception of the design to try the conscience of the King with the play. This interjection of consideration, deliberation, shows it. Yet Hamlet had already settled with the players that they should speak some verses interpolated in *The Murder of Gonzago*. This inconsistency is not justified by alleging Hamlet's inconsistency of character. In fact, the interjection ought not to be there, as it makes prospective what is evidently retrospective.

'Making prospective what is evidently retrospective': it is thus that the matter stands according to the usual interpretation. But it is not Shakespeare that has been at fault this time, but his reader.

If such tests of authorship as are applied to works claiming to be Shakespeare's are applied to this sub-play, Hamlet's authorship will no longer be questioned. The incident dramatized is one with which only he was acquainted; the sentiments upon re-marriage are entirely peculiar to him; the sententiousness expressing itself in rhymed couplets is characteristic of him; and if his commonplace-book (I. v. 107 and 100-1) could be recovered, there can be little doubt that some of the passages would be found to have been taken from that source—ll. 217-19, for example, or 221-3, or 198-201.

It is very strange that Coleridge first, and one commentator after another since, found the style of the sub-play to be the same as that of the player's speech in Act II, Sc. ii, which it certainly is not. Its first six lines might be compared in style with

the player's speech, for Hamlet naturally started composing in scholarly and laboriously rhetorical language characteristic of the Senecan work of which he approved. But after these few lines the manner changes; and if the language of the dialogue thenceforward is still reminiscent of Senecan work (which means still appropriate to Hamlet), it is so in a different respect, namely, in its sententiousness, for it is no longer high-flown and rhetorical, but simple and argumentative, and it may be compared with Hamlet's discourse in Act III, Sc. iv (especially with the latter part, where he is calmer), rather than with the player's speech in Act II, Sc. ii. This is what one might expect: for as the author proceeded with his composition, the anxiety to reach his mother's conscience would naturally render his dialogue more direct. There is far more resemblance between the language of the player's speech and that of the first half of Hamlet's extempore effusion at the close of that scene, than there is between the language of either of these passages and that of the sub-play's rhymed dialogue.

The only difficulty that can be suggested as to Hamlet's authorship is that eighty lines were rather much to get composed, and also learned by the actors, in one day. That difficulty will not be put forward by anyone acquainted with the dramatic treatment of time. The general principle of dramatic time, I would add (without particular reference to the passage before us), is that gain in artistic unity compensates for loss of versimilitude through condensation.

The best account of Senecan work is perhaps that in Prof. J. W. Cunliffe's Introduction to *Early English Classical Tragedies*.

D.

ON THE GHOST IN ACT III, SC. iv,
AND IN ACT I.

(See p. 180 ; also pp. 70-5, and 57, including
footnote.)

The general subject of Shakespeare's ghosts deserves a better treatment than it has yet been accorded. Commentators seem content to know nothing about the classes of phenomena to which phantasms belong, for which, if there was good excuse a generation or two ago, there is not at any rate to-day. All that I can attempt is to deal with a few points bearing upon HAMLET.

From time to time a writer seeks to show that Shakespeare, in the spirit of Queen Gertrude, meant every ghost to be taken as 'the very coinage' of the percipient's 'brain.' This theory, long since propounded by more than one German writer, is independently revived, I observe, by 'J. E. G. de M.' in the *Contemporary Review* of February 1912. Now it is quite easy to hold that this is the character of the apparition in Act III, Sc. iv,—that all that happens is that an undercurrent of Hamlet's thought jets into a moment's recognition, its appearance of externality being due to Hamlet's 'ecstasy,' so that the apparition is as real as, and no more real than, the dagger of Macbeth that 'marshalled him the way that he was going.' But it is quite impossible to apply such a theory to Act I, Sc. ii or Sc. iv, and very unsatisfactory to hold that these cases represent, while the other case does not represent, a concession to superstition, and that in Act III, Sc. iv, Shakespeare did not mean the voice to be audible

to a theatrical audience—a view strongly expressed by J. H. Hudson in the *Westminster Review* of April 1900. The recrudescence of this theory from time to time, in spite of the puzzles into which it leads one, is (I think) to be explained by the difficult nature of the phenomena.

The truth with regard to Shakespeare's phantasms is probably to be found in a synthesis between what used to be the popular view, and that quasi-rational view of to-day. That is to say, while on the one hand a phantasm, often visible or audible to several persons at a time, is far from being (as was Macbeth's visionary dagger) mere illusion, yet on the other hand the forms assumed to eye and ear are to some extent conditioned by the temper of the percipient.

To take first Act I, Sc. v. Lines 10-22 are conditioned by a thought of Hamlet's expressed in III. iii. 81-4. Much of the rest of the communication is conditioned by the thought in I. ii. 255-8. Line 80 sounds so like words of the son's that some commentators have transferred them from his father to him. And, finally, what is most striking is that l. 91 is conditioned by the temper of ll. 95, 97, 111 (see my comments on the passage). The impulsion conveyed by the Ghost's words, instead of being (as was desirable) in a direction contrary to his natural bent, turns out to be towards continuing to do what he was by temper disposed to do, namely towards *thinking*.

Then to take Act III, Sc. iv. The Ghost in this case is even more unlucky in its remarks than in the previous case. Hamlet again seizes upon its last words (not voluntarily, of course, but instinctively) to make of them an excuse for ignoring the purpose of its coming, the injunction to 'speak' to his mother being treated as though that were the object of the 'visitation.' Thus once again the impulsion con-

veyed by the words turns out to be towards doing what he was already doing. namely *talking*, whereas they seemed intended to have a contrary effect. So the words of the Ghost are conditioned by Hamlet's temper.

The subject however, requires to be dealt with, I think, not by a writer of literary criticism, but by a psychologist (if such there be) who really understands the results of recent psychical research; and to such an investigator I would just recall my remark that the poetic imagination takes all knowledge to be its province.

E.

ON HAMLET AS AN AUTHOR.

I have said (pp. 240-1) that under happier circumstances Hamlet might have become a writer of distinction; that he might, for example, have collaborated with Burton in writing *THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY*. As an illustration of this, I string together some scattered passages from Burton's Preface. The body of the work would doubtless yield equally interesting illustrations, but I have limited myself to the Preface. Baconians will, I know, accept these extracts as fresh evidence that Bacon wrote *THE ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY* in addition to writing *HAMLET*.

The page references which precede the quotations from Burton relate to Bohn's edition. The footnotes refer to passages in *HAMLET*.

DEMOCRITUS JUNIOR TO THE READER.

(Pp. 11-12) Gentle reader, I presume that thou wilt be very inquisitive to know what antic actor this is.¹ I am a free man born, and may choose whether I will tell; who can compel me? I would not willingly be known.² My subject is of man and humankind. Thou thyself art the subject of my discourse.³ (Pp. 13-16) Yet thus much I will say: I have lived a sedentary life in the University;⁴ all my treasure is in Minerva's tower. I live still a collegiate student, and lead a monastic life,⁵ sequestered from tumults and troubles of the world. I did for my recreation now and then walk abroad, look into the world, and could not choose but make some little observation.⁶

(Pp. 48-54) Heraclitus, out of serious meditation of men's lives, fell a weeping.⁷ Democritus on the other side burst out a laughing;⁸ and he was so far carried with this ironical passion that the citizens took him to be mad, and sent ambassadors to Hippocrates the physician, that he would exercise his skill upon him. He went to see Democritus, whom he found in his garden all alone with a book on his knees and busy at his study.⁹ The multitude stood gazing. Hippocrates commended his work, admiring his leisure. And why, quoth Democritus, have not you that leisure?¹⁰ Because, replied Hippocrates, affairs necessary to be done deprive us of our time. At this Democritus profusely laughed (his friends in the mean time lamenting his madness). Hippocrates asked the reason why he laughed. He told him, at the vanity and fopperies of the time. How many strange humours are in men! These are things, quoth he, that give me matter of laughter; your

¹ I. v. 115-80; II. ii. 170-270.

² III. ii. 379-89.

³ II. ii. 315-22; V. i. 83-121. ⁴ I. ii. 113, 170-3.

⁵ II. ii. 260-2.

⁶ I. v. 98-109; V. i. 150-3.

⁷ I. ii. 129-59; II. ii. 575-615.

⁸ II. ii. 170-207, and 570; III. i. 103; III. ii. 302.

⁹ I. v. 107; II. ii. 160, 168.

¹⁰ IV. iv. 36-9.

avarice, enormous villanies, unsatiable desires, conspiracies, besides your dissimulation and hypocrisy, bearing deadly hatred and yet shadowing it with a good face. Some prank up their bodies and have their minds full of execrable vices. Women are all day a-dressing. Why should I not laugh at those to whom folly seems wisdom? Hippocrates left him, and told them that, notwithstanding small neglects of his attire, body, diet, the world had not a wiser, a more learned, a more honest man.

Thus Democritus esteemed of the world in his time. But we have a new theatre, a new scene, a new Comedy of Errors, a new company of maskers,¹ painted puppets,² outsides,³ fantastic shadows,⁴ monsters,⁵ giddy-heads.⁶ When Jupiter's wedding was solemnized, amongst the rest came Chrysalus, rich in golden attires, but an ass. Jupiter turned him and his followers into butterflies: and so they continue still, roving about in pied coats, and are called chrysalides by the wiser sort of men; that is, golden outsides, and things of no worth.⁷

(P. 58) What would Democritus have said to see, hear, and read so many bloody battles, to make sport for princes, for vain titles, or out of desire for domineering? ⁸ (P. 60) How may Nature expostulate with mankind: 'I made thee a harmless, quiet, a divine creature'? ⁹ Would this, think you, have enforced our Democritus to laughter, or rather made him alter his tone, and weep and stand amazed? Many volunteers offer themselves, marching bravely on with a cheerful noise of drums and trumpets, void of all fear they run into eminent dangers, to get a name of valour, honour, and applause,¹⁰ which lasts not neither, for it is a mere flash, this fame, and like a rose within one day is it gone.¹¹

(Pp. 66-71) How would our Democritus have been

¹ III. iv. 98, 102.

² III. i. 148.

³ I. ii. 154-5.

⁴ II. ii. 269-70.

⁵ III. i. 144; III. iv. 190.

⁶ III. i. 148-58.

⁷ V. ii. 86-90, and 193-202.

⁸ IV. iv. 18-19, and 50-3.

⁹ II. ii. 319.

¹⁰ IV. iv. 60-5.

¹¹ V. i. 228-39.

affected, to see a wicked caitiff or fool, a monster of men, a dizzard, a covetous wretch, a beast, a filthy loathsome carcass,¹ assume unto himself glorious titles.² To see another neat in clothes, spruce, full of courtesy, empty of grace, wit, talk nonsense!³ To see so many lawyers, so little justice; the judge bribed, sentence prolonged.⁴ What's the world itself? A vast chaos,⁵ the theatre of hypocrisy,⁶ a shop of knavery.⁷ So long as they are behoveful, they love, but when there is no more good to be expected, hang him up or cashier him.⁸ It's not worth, wisdom, learning, religion, for which we are respected, but greatness, office, authority.⁹ To see a man protest friendship, smile with an intent to do mischief!¹⁰

(P. 81) Seneca and the Stoics are of opinion that where is any the least perturbation, wisdom may not be found.

(P. 83)

'He is wise that can command his own will,¹¹
Whom poverty,¹² nor death, nor bands can fright,
Checks his desires,¹³ scorns honours; just¹⁴ and right.'
(HORACE: *Sat.* ii.)

But where shall such a man be found? ¹⁵

(Pp. 107-9) We have need of another Hercules,¹⁶ to clean the Augean stable, or another Theban Crates to reform our manners.¹⁷ As Hercules purged the world of monsters, so did he fight against envy, lust, avarice, and all those monsters of the mind. It were to be wished we had some such visitor. He might root out our barbarism,¹⁸ cut off our tumultuous desires, inordinate lusts, root out impiety,¹⁹ purge all our northern countries of gluttony and intemperance.²⁰

¹ III. iv. 96-9, 182, 190.

³ V. ii. 81 *sq.*

⁴ III. i. 72.

² *Ibid.* 100.

⁶ I. ii.; III. i.

⁵ I. ii. 134; II. ii. 310.

⁷ III. i. 131.

⁸ III. ii. 215-19; IV. ii. 16-23.

⁹ II. ii. 380-4.

¹⁰ I. v. 108; III. iv. 201-3.

¹¹ III. ii. 75-6.

¹² *Ibid.*, 63, 72.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 68-70.

¹⁶ I. ii. 153;

V. i. 314; V. ii. 367.

¹⁷ I. iv. 13-38; III. iv. 35-191.

¹⁸ I. ii. 135-7.

¹⁹ III. iv. 47.

²⁰ I. iv. 17-20.

But these are vain wishes: so long as they can wag their beards they will play the knaves and fools.¹ It is a thing far beyond Hercules' labours.

I will yet, to satisfy and please myself, make an Utopia of my own, a New Atlantis. (Pp. 111-112) I will have in each town colleges of musicians and actors,² artists and philosophers.³ I will not have a barren acre.⁴ (Pp. 115-7) I will have all magistrates to be chosen as the literati in China, for a scholar deserves better than a soldier.⁵ No prowling officer shall insult over his inferiors.⁶ (P. 119) If any be drunk,⁷ he shall drink no more strong drink in a twelvemonth after. If one die, the other party shall not marry till six months after.⁸ Murder, adultery, shall be punished by death.⁹ (P. 121) I hate wars. For I do highly magnify that saying of Hannibal to Scipio, 'Neither Sicily nor Sardinia are worth such costs and pains, or so many famous captains' lives.'¹⁰

(Pp. 126-7) Of philosophers and scholars, dictators of old-world wisdom, I have already spoken in general terms; those refined men, minions of the Muses, to whom 'tis given to have brains and intellects, you shall find a fantastical strain, an affected style, throughout their works.¹¹ Democritus, that common flouter of folly, was ridiculous himself. (Pp. 129-130) Of our artists and philosophers, I will generally conclude, they are a kind of madmen. That lovers are mad I think no man will deny; 'most women are fools'; Seneca-men,¹² young or old,—who doubts it? (P. 134) The dog days last all the year round, they are all mad. Whom shall I except? Nicholas Nemo, or Monsieur Nobody shall go free.

(P. 137) If any man shall ask in the mean time, who I am, I confess I am as mad as anyone.¹³ 'I seem

¹ II. ii. 198-223, 521-3; III. iv. 214-15.

² II. ii. 454-467, 546-9; III. ii. 1-50.

³ I. iv. 23-38; III. i. 56-88.

⁴ II. ii. 310.

⁵ I. ii. 168-73. ⁶ III. i. 62, 64. ⁷ I. iv. 8-16; III. iii. 89.

⁸ I. ii. 145-53.

⁹ V. ii. 63-70.

¹⁰ IV. iv. 25-9, 60-3.

¹¹ II. ii. 109-24.

¹² II. ii. 467-541.

¹³ II. ii. 611; V. ii. 250.

to you insane, I pray you think so';¹ though I be not so mad, neither, as thou perhaps takest me to be.²

(Pp. 138-9) If I have overshot myself, you must consider what it is to speak in an assumed habit and name. Why should any man be offended? if he be not guilty it concerns him not; it is not my freeness of speech but a guilty conscience, a galled back of 'his own,'³ that makes him winch.

¹ III. ii. 333; IV. iii.

² III. iv. 140-2.

³ III. ii. 251-3.

4

THE END.

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